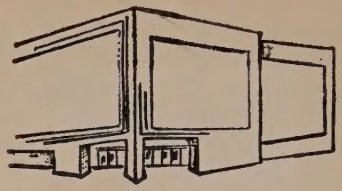

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A KNIGHT OF CAROLINA

By

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1927

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A KNIGHT OF
CAROLINA

MADE IN UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

To

The Friend of My Heart,

MARY HADLEY WOODARD.

"The more we love, the better we are; and the greater our friendships are, the dearer we are to God."

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A Knight of Carolina

CHAPTER I

I AM SENT UPON A QUEST BY NO MEANS TO MY LIKING

"To America," said my father; "that and nothing ess," and having so said, shut his lips in that grim 'ashion I had learned to know, and knowing, feared. 'urther argument, I was well aware, was useless. Yet n the tumult of mind into which his disclosure had hrown me, I ventured protest.

"To that wilderness over the seas? Surely, sir, you orget that it is little more than the habitation of savage nen and of prowling wild beasts!"

His keen gray eyes gave me a look that was like the hrust of steel.

"Are you thinking more of your own welfare than of our brother's necessities?" he queried. "You were ver mindful of yourself, Mark Ashton."

I went hot all over. Sharp words sprang to my ongue, but I held them back; I must forbear. He was ıy father; the source whence my being had sprung. 'Tis rue, I had not so chosen. What child ever has choice ı such matter? I knew well how he regarded me, and he knowledge had embittered my life ever since I could emember. My birth had cost the life of my sweet and racious mother, the wife he adored. Daily had I evi- ence that I was ever a reminder of that loss.

"Why should I not think more of the dangers of that avage wilderness into which it is your desire to send ıe, sir, than of my brother's imaginary need?" I made

question, so soon as I could trust my voice. "Why should I now be asked to face sacrifice for a brother who has never, so far as I know, given thought to me or bestowed any mede of affection so far as I can recall? Yea, what filial devotion, what consideration even has he shown to you, sir, leaving you as he did when most you needed him, going away without one word of satisfactory explanation to you, who ——"

"Silence!" commanded my father; and again that grim closing of the lips which meant more than a multitude of words.

"You will not let me speak, sir," I cried hotly, and wondering at my own daring in continuing the matter "of aught amiss in my brother's conduct and in obedience to your will, I must forbear. But I cannot refrain sir, to ask question now of you and thus: If 'tis not the will of my brother to avoid holding aught of communication with those he has left behind him here in the homeland, with you most of all, sir—why this long, unbroken silence? Why no word from him in all these years?"

My father's glance shifted away from mine, and his face paled. I could see that the questions had gone home. Yet a moment later he lifted his head with pride.

"Because," he began in a steady voice, and fixing his gaze now full upon me, "as I believe, it is beyond his power to hold with us such communication as you suggest."

"You mean ——"

"He is in trouble, in sore trouble," he answered with conviction. "I know not what it is, but the shadow of it is on my heart," his voice quivered. "For days, yea for weeks, for months now it has oppressed me. It is the dark cloud that hangs over my days, the heavy burden that drives sleep from my pillow by night."

There was a tenderness in his voice I had heard there before, but always for my brother, never for me, alas! Never for the son who had remained at home, but ever for the one who had wandered away uncaring, who had gone with no better excuse than that the new world across the seas, the land of adventure, called to him.

"I think, sir ——" I began.

He moved his hand impatiently.

"Let me finish," he said a little sternly. "There are places in this wilderness, in the new land known as America, where, as it has been told me, men entirely free of wrong-doing have been thrown into prison and kept there to languish through years, merely to satisfy the greed or the revenge, as the case may be, of other men. Edward, my son," his tongue lingered upon the name as if 'twere sweet to keep it there; "Edward, my son," he repeated, "was ever of an unsuspecting nature. He would easily be the prey of evil men. Graciously endowed with many qualities to win favor, he nevertheless had one weakness, an o'er-hasty tongue. I fear me that this, or his proneness to be beguiled by the fair words of men has brought him into sore trouble."

Though I strove to resist it, I could not keep back a smile of incredulity. Such was not in accord with the impression of my brother that had been stamped upon my youthful mind by events of the past; an impression deepened by what I had heard others say of him. If my own impressions were correct and the words of others were to be trusted, then my brother was far from being the unsuspecting, easily-swayed being my father believed him. That he had a will of iron, that he was highly skilled in the art of taking care of himself, this was firmly established in my mind. But naught of it I conveyed in words to my father. His sorrow was heavy

enough without my adding to it. But I could not forbear one further question.

"But why, if my brother reached America, did he not send word or letter back to you, sir, to acquaint you with the fact that his journey had been safely accomplished? Many ships pass back and forth, even during one year, and 'tis now a span of more than twelve, as you are aware, sir, since he went away. I was then but a lad of fourteen."

My father for a full moment held silence. I could see that this was not a new question to him. No doubt he had turned it over in his own mind again and again. I could see, too, that a spasm like that of a sudden sharp pain had contracted his brow.

"Can it be that he has never reached America?" I queried suddenly. "Mayhap his vessel was not seaworthy. Mayhap, too, 'twas pirates that——"

My father stopped me with a gesture.

"Nay," he spoke firmly; "he was not lost at sea; neither did pirate craft fall upon the *London Queen*. Your brother reached America. He landed at Charles Town, in Carolina. He was there for some time, to my knowledge. If 'twere not thus, I would not know where to send you now."

I gazed at him in astonishment. This was a revelation on which I had not counted. Somehow it had become fixed in my mind that my father had never received aught of word, either directly or indirectly, from my brother since that morning of midsummer, now so long ago, when a headstrong youth, but recently come to his majority, he had made hasty departure for America.

"Your brother reached America," said my father again, and speaking slowly now, as though weighing well each word, "and he is still there. Some intuition makes me feel this to be a certainty. He is still there, and he

is in trouble. That belief, too, is fixed in my mind. He needs us; he needs us both. But only one can go. It must be you, since ——"

He glanced as he spoke toward his bandaged leg stretched out upon the stool before him. A week before his horse had thrown him, rolling partly upon his leg. A bone had snapped. 'Twas no serious fracture, but the flesh had been badly bruised and lacerated. It would be weeks yet ere he could use it, and perhaps never again freely.

My father had turned his head now to gaze steadily at me. His eyes said plainly, "It is thus the case stands: I who would go am helpless, while you who can go will not. 'Tis your brother's need that calls, but your heart is hard. But then, what better could I expect of you?"

I started as though he had struck me. Had he really uttered the last words, or did I dream them? That lips as well as eyes had spoken, I was soon convinced.

My eyes fell before his piercing glance. I strove for words, but the words refused to come. Hot and sore they pressed upon my heart. Would I ever be able to show myself in a deserving light before my father? Would he ever know me as I was, and not as he regarded me? Would he ever be just enough to look upon me as innocent of the price I had cost him?

My father's words, sharp as the prick of a sword, brought me back suddenly from my bitter musings.

"Do you not see," he said, "that if you fail to set out on this quest, if you turn your back coldly upon your brother in his day of need, how your conduct will appear to the eyes of others? How all right-thinking men will look upon your refusal to go to your brother's succor? He is the older and the heir. If he never returns, you ——"

I stopped him by a gesture he could but heed. He had dealt me now the cruelest thrust of all.

I sprang up, my hands clenched, my heart beating so fast I felt that I should surely strangle.

"Say no more, sir!" I cried, and spoke as calmly as my tumultuous heart would permit; "there seems to be naught but that I should go. I am ready, sir. When shall I set forth?"

He viewed me hesitantly for a brief span. Evidently he was struggling with some quickly awakened emotion. Then he spoke.

"You are ready? Well and good. 'Tis as it should be, and as I hoped it would come to pass. When shall you set forth?" He hesitated for a moment, then added decisively, "Let it be the day after to-morrow; the sooner the better."

"So soon as that, sir?" I stammered, feeling my heart sink as with a weight of lead. Could he thus easily and quickly send me across dangerous seas, into that savage wilderness, where he had himself admitted there were perils even greater than those at the hands of the red savage?

"The sooner the better," he repeated, then asked coldly, "Now that you have arrived at a decision, why should there be delay?"

He turned as he spoke and took from the table at his side a packet of papers neatly folded, and began slowly to untie the string of tape that bound them.

"Sit down," he continued, "there is much that I have to say to you. These papers here will explain some matters. There are others that I must impress upon you. The last time, as I have informed you, that I had word of your brother, he was at or near Charles Town, in the Province of Carolina. 'Tis to that port I wish you now to journey. There first make diligent search after

the manner I shall direct; thence into all the country surrounding, even into those wilds where savages roam, if need be. Your brother ever had a taste for adventure; there is no telling whither it has led him. But more particularly," he paused, then went on in unsteady voice, "I desire you to make search of the prisons. Spare not yourself in this; neither the means I send with you. Remember there is no lock that will not yield to the magic key of gold.

"Among other papers," proceeded my father, "you will find here," tapping the packet as he spoke, "letters from and a letter to my friend of many years and my old comrade in arms, Sir Nathaniel Johnson. When these letters were written he had been made Governor of certain Islands of the Crown in the West Indies; but within recent months, I have heard that he has been for some years now a resident of the Carolina Province, and is still honored of men. If alive at this time, and I have no reason to doubt this, though he is older than I am by near a decade, he will do all in his power to give you the aid I have requested of him."

This and much more my father said to me. At length he paused. His head drooped upon his hand and he leaned heavily upon the table. The attitude was one of utter weariness; of a woe that went deep.

My heart moved with pity for him as I noted how whitened was the hair that fell in short, thick locks to his shoulders; how deep were the furrows the plowshare of sorrow had run upon his brow.

For the first time I began to feel a stirring of pleasure because of the consent I had yielded to his request.

As though he divined my thoughts, he glanced up suddenly. His eyes met mine. What he saw in my eyes I know not, but it must have been something that stirred his heart. What I saw in his eyes made my heart leap.

"Think not," he said in trembling voice, "that it is no trial to send thus away from me across storm-lashed seas and into a savage land the one remaining son of my old age."

Then as he held out his hand to me and drew me nearer, I fell upon my knees beside him. His hand was laid quiveringly upon my head as he said:

"God bless and keep you, lad, and bring you safely home again."

If only he had said that he loved me. If only he had let me see that it was a stab to the heart to have me go from him into a land of perils. If only he could have shown me some of that love and pride I had seen in his eyes and heard in his voice for my brother. How much easier then would have been the treading of the hard way along which he was sending me. But alas! having been the innocent cause of his bitterest grief, how could I hope to become the source of any joy to him?

The mist still blinded my eyes as I left my father's presence and betook me to the stables, somewhere in the neighborhood of which I knew I should find Adam Ware, my father's oldest retainer and my most loyal servitor since my earliest remembrance. I craved conversation with him, and on the one subject that now held my thoughts. He of all others, I was sure, could set me right in matters pertaining to my brother. Could it not be, after all, that my impressions of the past were wrong? That the stories I had heard had been but idle gossip?

"He was ever a bold, daring lad," was Master Edward," admitted Adam, driven to the wall by my insistence; "proud, too, and headstrong; bent on his own way. He knew not how to give way to others; to stand aside and see others win what he had desired. Hast forgotten, sir, the blows he gave you when you would

not let him have the colt your grandfather had said should be yours?"

Had I forgotten? How could I when that was one of the memories deeply impressed upon my mind?

"'Twas a bold way he had with him, a master's way," continued Adam. "Anger rose hot within him did another stand in the way of what he coveted. He must be first, or he would be naught. 'Twas like marrow to his bones, the blood to his veins to be the prime favorite among women, the master among men.

"Yet, too, he could be kind," went on Adam, his voice husky and quavering as his heart was stirred by memories. "Kind to the old and the poor and the sick. Many's the time I've seen the heart of him go out in generous deed, and his hand extended with shining gold. Ah, sir, he was a two-sided being; with the spirits of evil and good striving ever within him; but more of evil than of good, I fear me. But there, sir, enough! You have driven me to say more than I intended," and he looked at me reproachfully.

"Yea, much more than you could ever get my father to believe," I felt driven to say, and bitterly.

"He believes more than you think," replied Adam hastily, then checked his words, adding in a different tone, "But 'twas always careful Master Edward was to preserve the proper mien and gait before your father, but away from him——"

Once more the old man halted in his speech, and looking at me with a gathering mist in his eyes, said shakily:

"And now you must be sent off across dangerous seas and into a wild country to search for him. O young master, it breaks my heart to see you go! What if you should never come back again!" His voice caught in his throat, and reaching out a trembling hand he placed it upon my shoulder, as though he would stay my going.

I caught the gnarled old hand, hardened by toil, and pressed it in my own.

"Adam," I said, and strove to show him a bold front, "don't worry. I shall come back, and I will bring my brother with me."

He shook his head.

"Should you live to come back, young master, which Heaven grant, you will not bring your brother with you."

"Why do you say that, Adam?" I asked quickly.

"Even if you find Master Edward in America, he will not return with you, because —— But you will not find him! The poor lad is surely dead, else why this long silence, these many years with never a word from him?"

"I have thought of that, too, Adam. Surely if he be yet alive, he would have sent some message to my father. But, Adam," I broke off, as a certain suggestion in words he had just spoken began to define itself, and somewhat to my uneasiness, "what did you mean by what you said some moments ago, that if I did find my brother, he would not return with me?"

He looked at me with some uneasiness in his manner, I thought, before he replied:

"He will not come back, young master, because of—of that here which he does not care to face."

My heart gave a startled leap. Was there an even darker past to my brother's credit than I wot of?

"Tell me plainly what you mean, Adam," I insisted; but instead of replying, he had question for me:

"Didst never hear, lad, of one named Andrew Boland?"

I shook my head slowly, though at the name a vague memory had begun to stir within me. Where had I heard the name and in what way?

" 'Twas a queer matter," said Adam, "that of your

brother and Andrew Boland. You were too young at the time, lad, no doubt, to take notice; but others older remember well and still ponder over the mystery of it. A strange attachment it was truly, that of Master Edward for the yeoman's son. He would slight any of his young gentleman friends at any time for Andrew, and would leave the gayest scene for Andrew's company. 'Twas most marvelous, too, the influence this same Andrew Boland had over him. What no one else could get Master Edward to do was as easy as snapping his fingers for Andrew Boland to accomplish. 'Twas all the more remarkable, too, because of the masterly way Master Edward had with all others. Many are the wild ways into which Andrew Boland led him.

"Your father tried again and again to wean Master Edward away from Andrew Boland, but of no avail. The strangest part was the likeness between Master Edward and this Andrew Boland. I have myself mistaken one for the other on more than one occasion, but never close by. The resemblance was more in general appearance than in copy of features, though the likeness was there, too. It was plain, too, to be seen in the manner of each. I can see now that this was because Andrew purposely copied Master Edward in everything. 'Twas a fateful friendship, at least for Master Edward; for 'tis my opinion, and that of others I could name, that it led to the chiefest of his troubles; and it certainly took him over the seas to that wild land men call America. For listen, lad, the same ship that carried your brother over the seas took also Andrew Boland."

I exclaimed sharply and started to put question to him; but he stayed me, and coming nearer, lowered his voice almost to a whisper as he said with solemnity, the remembrance of which lingered with me, and kept awake an uneasy feeling in my mind for days thereafter:

"Wherever in America, sir, you find your brother, if find him you do, make sure that if Andrew Boland still lives, he will be near at hand. And hear these words, lad, and remember them, if the two be together, no words you can use and no plea you can offer will bring your brother back with you, unless it is that villain Andrew Boland himself who bids him go."

CHAPTER II

I FALL UPON ROUGH FORTUNE BY THE WAY

THUS it came about that in the year of grace 1705, on a day in the early springtime, I found myself aboard the staunch craft, *Abigail and Anne,* Amos Briggs, master, outward bound from Bristol port to Charles Town, in Carolina.

'Twas as mixed a company of ship's passengers, I doubt me not, as ever crossed seas together. There were real gentlemen, both in blood and bearing; conceited coxcombs, with no savor of gentility about them; roisterers, gamesters, rakes, blusterers, soldiers adrift through the fortunes of war; adventurers, treasure-seekers alust for gold; tradesmen, solid and assured in fortune already founded; and of the fair sex but a small number.

Below decks, swarming like flies, was a throng of human beings, apparently the scum and scurf of the earth. In this motley company were no doubt cutthroats, thieves, and of escaped jail-birds not a few; but there were also of the unfortunate, innocent, suffering ones, brought to this hard pass through no fault of their own, many more. Indentured servants the most of these were, men and women, bond slaves, bartered body and soul into bondage through misfortune.

Sick and heartsore I turned from contemplating these wretched beings, but with wholesome food for thought. I had been glooming over my own condition, but how bright my sky contrasted with theirs!

I dashed the mist from my eyes as I stood leaning against the ship's rail, looking backward upon the shores of England, fast fading against the horizon; perhaps

fading out of my sight forever. The thought had brought the tears with stinging force, but now I flung them away and braced my shoulders. I would be brave, I resolved, for sake of the mission on which I had been sent. I would so acquit myself as at least to win my father's commendation.

For the first few days I kept to myself. My heart was too sore for conversation with strange men. But there were agreeable gentlemen aboard, several of them, I soon became aware, of long residence in the colony whither I was bound. They had been to England on matters of business, some of them in their own behalf, others as messengers in affairs of state. I was soon led to friendly converse with more than one of these gentlemen.

Two of the most agreeable were Captain James Cantey and Master Daniel Brewton, both planters residing on the banks of a great river named the Cooper, in honor of Lord Ashley Cooper, one of the Proprietors of the Province. This noble river, on which many English gentlemen had their homes, flowed into the sea at Charles Town. Captain Cantey had been in the wars with the Indians and bore the scars of the arrows of these fiends. Two other gentlemen who did impress me most agreeably were Master Isaac Mazyck, a merchant of Charles Town, and one Master Herbert Gibbes, a young barrister of handsome face and form and quick wit, who was returning from a course of law in London.

From these gentlemen I learned much of the state of affairs in the Carolina Province, and I am no wise loth to confess that the intelligence thus gained did not in any degree tend to allay the disturbed condition of my mind. The colony had fallen upon troublous times. The people and the Governor—(it did surprise me somewhat to learn that the Governor was none other than that same Sir Nathaniel Johnson, friend of my

father) were arrayed against each other. A political storm had gathered, and it had been lashed into fury by those same elements of religious discord that had time and again wrought terror and havoc in the Mother Land. The Governor, driving the Legislature to do his will, had caused a law to be passed barring from civil and religious rights all those who were not, and who would not become, communicants of the Church of England. This law had passed by the close margin of one vote.

The enactment of this law had fallen like a thunderbolt upon the Colony; for, when the King in his munificence did bestow upon the Lords Proprietors all that vast tract of country, called in honor of his father, Carolina, civil and religious liberty had been guaranteed to all settlers who were freemen. Truth to tell, this promise of "liberty of conscience" had been the great magnet which drew men in shoals from over the seas. For, in addition to the Charter there was Locke's Constitution, prepared for the government of this same Province of Carolina, by the great philosopher himself, which did proclaim in no uncertain language "absolute liberty, just and true liberty, equal and impartial liberty." I was no fair judge, knowing naught of matters as they really existed in the disturbed Province, but it did very clearly appear to me, on calm reflection, that if I had been correctly informed, the act of the Governor and the Legislature was an evidence of bad faith; contrary to the Charter and the Constitution, and as such objectionable to all fair-minded men.

Captain Cantey and Master Brewton were on the side of the Governor. His position, they asserted, was a trying one to fill. Men were clamoring all around him, each with his own axe to grind. Dissension and sedition were abroad in the land. Both Church and State were in danger of disruption. A loyal Churchman,

seeking to serve his God as staunchly as he served his Queen, the Governor had been led to the passage of the Church Act, believing it the one effective remedy for the cure of the hot fever of dissension then raging.

Master Mazyck and Master Gibbes were warm against the Governor. He was narrow, bigoted, and arbitrary. He had wilfully shut his eyes to the true state of affairs in the Colony. It was a tyrant's mandate that forced men to worship against their consciences. The Charter and the Constitution decreed liberty of religious faith to all, and any departure therefrom was not only a violation of men's rights, but an act that called for the condemnation of every fair-minded man. Moreover, the Governor had schemed to win the Huguenot vote in the Assembly, under promises he knew very well he could not fulfill. The Huguenots, having themselves suffered rank injustice as well as persecution at the hands of the Churchmen, were now allied with the Churchmen and against their brother Dissenters. No wonder the latter had waxed hot with resentment.

Among these four men these grave matters were discussed for the most part calmly and with brotherly forbearance. Not so with others aboard.

One Major Popple, a fierce old cock with a stiff comb, a sharp beak and a pompous strut, did greatly amuse me at times. Yet for all his barnyard voice, his fish-market language, and his spluttering attacks of choler, when he seemed nigh to choking, his words sometimes hit the mark with a ring of truth that both startled and could not be gainsaid. His bitterest opponent was Sir Christopher Bandy, a man with an angular, overdressed figure, a sharp, high-pitched voice, a much be-powdered peruke, and shanks fallen into leanness, but a staunch Churchman, withal, and a hot Johnson man, as was plain to see.

"'Tis a shame and an outrage, sir," blustered Major Popple, "to force religion down a man's throat as you would a nauseous draught. By the Almighty, sir, what right has any man, be he king or serf, to interfere between another man and his God? No more right, sir, have you or I to meddle with a man's religion than with the bread he eats. Let him have the kind that's best suited to his spiritual palate, say I. Gad, sir, but the Governor is driving everything before him with a high hand, and 'twill work him no good, mark my word! Nor my Lord Granville either."

"What has my Lord Granville to do with it?" demanded Sir Christopher testily.

"Everything, sir, everything! In my opinion, sir, the Palatine's at the bottom of it all. He's driving the Governor at the point of a sharp stick. He's fair gone mad with anger, sir, because of the privileges enjoyed heretofore by the Non-Conformists in Carolina. They've had too much of a finger in the Government pie to suit him."

"And my Lord Granville is right, sir. No man who holds to a mongrel religion is fit to sit in the law-making body of his country. 'Tis high time, sir, our Provincial Parliament was purged of all such. Thus the Palatine and the Governor see it. 'Tis the one true and established Church they serve; no more, no less."

"The Church, sir? Zounds! Think you my Lord Granville really cares that, sir, for the Church?" and the Major snapped his fingers. "'Tis my Lord Granville's own ends that are being served. I tell you, sir, the Palatine is after getting the Province of Carolina under his thumb and keeping it there. Matters aren't going to suit him. Men are beginning to wake up, to see things with clearer vision. They're not to be driven like cattle any longer at the point of my Lord Gran-

ville's lash. Carolina, sir, was founded as a freeman's country, and by the Almighty, it is going to be such, spite of a high-handed Governor, sir, spite of that tyrant Granville himself, spite of ——"

"Treason, sir, treason!" shouted Sir Christopher, red in the face. "Your tongue should be twisted out, sir, for speaking such words of as fair and honest men as ever walked the earth."

"'Fair and honest'? By the Forty Thieves, sir, you make me laugh! Well, we won't turn the Governor on this spit, sir, since he is being driven at the prick of Granville's spur. But Granville, now, sir! Lord, if it weren't so serious a subject, I'd laugh myself sore! 'Fair and honest'! Hast so soon forgotten the case of Master Nairne? How he wrote letters to the Proprietors, trying honestly to show them the condition of affairs in the Province; how he sought to call their attention to the existing abuses and corruption, asking only an unbiased investigation of the truth of his assertions? And what was his reward, sir? Granville claimed to have evidence that proved Master Nairne akin to Ananias, and forthwith dispatched his commands to the Province that Master Nairne should be cast into prison as a dangerous meddler! 'Twas done, sir, and there he languished for months."

"'Twas no more than his just deserts, sir!" thundered Sir Christopher, "for he meddled with matters that didn't concern him. He deserved to fall into the fire. He should have left the Proprietors to turn their own cakes."

The Major paid no attention to the interruption. He was launched full tide in his denunciation of my Lord Granville.

"And there is Master Boone now, sir, gone to the trouble of a trip to London, leaving his own affairs to

get on as best they can in his absence; gone as a messenger of the people of the Province to their Queen; with such letters and other documentary evidence as will open her eyes to the true condition of affairs in her Province. And what is the outcome, sir? At every step Boone takes to gain the ear of her Majesty, he is blocked by that villain, Granville. When I met Boone in London, just before I sailed, he had been there for weeks, and was no nearer her Majesty than the day he landed; and all because he had been repeatedly headed off by Granville. But worse than that, sir! Granville not only repudiated Boone before the other Proprietors, but he attempted to throw discredit upon the authenticity of every document Boone had with him. And as he treated Boone, sir, so he dealt with John Ashe. Made way with his papers, sir; crushed his spirit, sent him to death, sir, with a broken heart."

"John Ashe! Tush! he was a weak-lunged man when he crossed the seas, I say, sir, that the journey over and the fogs of London were too much for him, and that is all there is in it. As to Boone now—well, 'tis but another meddler who will soon be caught in the rope of his own weaving; and by the Lord Harry, sir, he'll get no more than he deserves!"

"Rope, sir, rope? Speak not of rope in connection with as true and honest a gentleman as all Carolina Province can produce! 'Tis the Governor and my Lord Granville who are weaving the rope, and for their own necks, to my way of thinking."

"And I tell you, sir," shouted Sir Christopher, "both the Palatine and the Governor are too lenient, far too lenient. The Governor doesn't come down half hard enough upon these brawlers and strife-makers. He should have a mailed fist. By the immortal James, sir! he should treat them as did old Governor Dale of Vir-

ginia. Every man who talks against the Church or the Province, who refuses to submit to the authority of both, should have a hole put in his tongue with a red hot iron. And for every man who refuses to give his allegiance to the one and only faith, the Church founded by God Almighty Himself, the Church of England, sir, let there be a levy on his crops, empty his storehouses, shorten his supply of victuals, and thus pinch his stomach. By my Lord James, sir! that will bring him to his senses as nothing else will. Then send him to the whipping post every day for a week. A sore back and a pinched stomach! That's your remedy for the man who won't take the Queen's religion, as he takes his morning meal, with a healthy appetite!"

"Sir," shouted the Major in his turn, "such talk is dastardly and such measures as you suggest, if even partially carried out, would set the Carolina Province aflame with the fires of revolution from end to end!"

The Major paused to take breath, and I marveled at the weight of earnestness in his tones as he continued:

"These are my words, sir, and mark them well: If the Governor is wise, he will pause and take heed. He has gone many steps too far already. Before he knows it, the Province will be plunged into a revolt which all his iron will cannot check. A Bacon will arise in Carolina, sir, as he did in Virginia, and Johnson, like Berkeley, will be brought to his senses along a hard way."

I pondered his words as I walked aft. If such were the times in Carolina; if the people were ripe with revolt against the Governor; if dissension and sedition were like a smouldering volcano, ready to burst into flame at any moment, what headway could I hope to make in the quest that carried me thither?

The air was thick with argument that morning. I could hear the voices of men high-raised all around me.

Near by were two dissenting clergymen of different faiths. They were wrangling over creeds and beliefs with the violence of two fish-wives on market day. I turned away in disgust. I had always set it down as my own belief that when men contended thus over religion, they had none either to keep or to give away. Pity 'twas, I thought me, that religion, like love, should be the source of earth's bitterest quarrels.

For some days we had spanking breezes and golden skies. Then the weather began to change. Rough winds were encountered, and we were pummeled by more than one tempest.

Again the sun shone and the sea grew tranquil. Leaning over the ship's rail, I glanced out over the mellowed track of waters. Despite the sweet light of earth and sky, there was gloom again in my heart. I was sick for home, for the sight of my father's face, for the clasp of Adam's rugged hand, and for a look upon that noble pile of stone, the home that had sheltered me since birth.

As I stood thus communing, a cry rang out:

"A sail! A sail!"

"Sail o-o-o!" came from the lookout.

"Stand by, all hands!" shouted the skipper.

I could see no craft then, but after some minutes it came into view. I noted the skipper anxiously studying it through his glasses. It seemed to me the hand holding the glasses trembled. I noted, too, that the men of the ship were gathered in groups, intensely expectant. I caught the murmur of their voices. There was evidence of excitement.

The craft came nearer and nearer. Then I heard the skipper speak.

" 'Tis after all but a merchantman, I think," he said, but his voice did not sound assured.

I understood the anxiety I saw upon the faces of all

and in the manner of the seamen. Always when crossing the seas to America there were two terrors to be feared, tempests and the fiends who sailed under the black flag.

The craft looked peaceful enough, however, as she now hove fully into sight.

"Strange she shows no colors," the skipper said again, and now his uneasiness was plain. Then with the swiftness of a bolt from the sky the exclamation dropped from him:

"God of mercy!" and in the next breath, "Man the guns! 'Tis a pirate's craft, after all!"

But now too late, for the vessel had turned broadside upon us, the black flag had been run to the mast, and the pirate chief himself was thundering out his threats, as he shook his fist menacingly at the skipper.

"Hands off those guns! At the first shot from your decks, we'll blow you into kingdom come!"

Then, very nearly as quickly as I can set it down, the black-hearted wretches were swarming over our bulwarks, brandishing their cutlasses. Men were shouting and swearing, women screaming, for it seemed, of a truth, that our last hour had come. But plunder, and not death, as we soon discovered, was the pirate chief's purpose. Oh, but he was a debonair villain with all his devilishness!

"Every man who keeps his tongue within his head," he announced, as he swaggered here and there, evidently the better to display his fine feathers, "and who hands over his valuables to their full extent, will be graciously permitted to retain for his own use that worthless treasure, his life."

He had a dashing appearance, unlike aught I had ever imagined of these black rovers of the sea. He was gorgeously arrayed, and he had the air of a man speak-

ing his words with the care and precision of one who craves the speech of gentility. A strange display of weakness, I thought me, in one of fiendish calling. His dark eyes flashed through the openings in the narrow strip of a mask he wore. Across his lip, fully exposed to view, was a curling black moustache. 'Twas not his own, I was next to sure, but fastened there by some artifice. False, too, were the long curling black locks that fell to his shoulders, but not false were the many jewels upon his fingers.

He detected me in the act of trying to conceal, deeper within my clothing, a few of the gold pieces with which my father had provided me, and came down upon me like a hawk upon its prey. I tried to draw sword, for not thus weakly would I surrender to him my all.

He struck my sword down even as 'twas lifted, and pinioned my arms against my sides, then called two of his men to hold me while he searched me.

"I could spit you on my sword as easily as a cook, a fowl," he told me, his black eyes ablaze through the slits in his mask, "but I will not, for 'tis not such worthless booty as life I seek. Besides," he continued, as he made close scrutiny of my face, "some moon-faced, love-lorn maid might cry her eyes out over your untimely departure into Hades. Nay, I am never cruel to the ladies," and he smirked in a way that set me fairly mad to send my fist with stinging force into his hateful face.

He fleeced me of everything I possessed in the way of money and jewels, with the exception of a small handful of guineas I had taken care to conceal among the effects left in my berth. Happily for me that I had so taken caution to do, or I should now have been a-beggared.

Sorest loss of all that befell me—the robber deprived me of my papers, of the precious packet my father had

prepared with such care. Perhaps I might have kept those papers had I not been so foolish as to give voice to a sharp exclamation when the hand of the pirate chief came in contact with them.

"Ah, ha!" he cried, as he saw me start and make movement to grasp the papers, "upon what precious documents have we now come? Love missives of the moon-faced maid, no doubt. Ah, no; they do not look such."

He fingered them some moments, opening and glancing over them. Then his were the lips to make quick exclamation, as he looked at me again, and so closely now my blood tingled at his impudent stare.

"In quest of a brother? Ha! Ha! A sweet mission truly. Hast thought that thou wilt find him in those jungles yonder? Hast thought, too, of what sometimes befalls adventurous youths who brave the wilderness and the savages who abide there?"

He was looking at me strangely as he spoke, and his hand shook a little as he placed the papers within the folds of his clothing. What could he want with them? They were of no value to other than myself and the brother I sought. On this plea I made bold to beseech them back.

"Of no value to me?" he echoed mockingly. "Wherefore such assurance, my young wiseacre? Perhaps I, too, shall want to search for a brother, aided by no less a mighty personage than the Governor himself, who knows?"

His mocking face stung me to desperation. I flung myself upon him, determined to wrest the papers from his keeping or give my life in the attempt.

He caught me savagely and flung me back; then I felt his sword point against my heart.

"Have a care," he said menacingly, "or I will not spare even your worthless life!" Then, as he was going

away, he turned again, and fixing his gaze full upon me, said in the same mocking tones that had before filled my heart with flaming wrath: "Farewell, my bantam! If you live to see again the dwellers at Ashtonholme, present them with the compliments of Black Locks, bold rover of the seas!"

CHAPTER III

I ARRIVE AT CHARLES TOWN IN THE PROVINCE OF CAROLINA

Two days later we came in sight of land; and, at about three of the clock in the afternoon, our ship's prow was turned into a shining stretch of swelling water, between green, low-lying banks, besprinkled with coppices of a glossy shrub-like vegetation, I was told was the wax myrtle. Beyond these were magnificent growths of tall forest trees, among which the stately pine was most conspicuous. Oh, but it was a land fair to look upon, and my heart swelled with pleasure as I gazed.

The waterway widened, and now we had come out upon a broad and beautiful harbor, fathoms deep, the skipper informed us, with many white sails gleaming thereon, and directly in front of us a city of tall white houses, others of dark cypress wood, and some of shining red brick, all lying golden in the light of the westering sun. A city it was embowered in rose gardens, with gleaming stretches of marsh to right and left, where wild fowl waded; and beyond all the grandeur of stately forests, unscarred by woodman's axe. Never had I thought to look upon sight so beautiful in this savage wilderness. Fervently I thanked God, and felt my heart strengthened.

Forts frowned upon us as we approached, and from more than one battlement I caught the gleam of cannon.

Captain Cantey's face beamed as he called my attention to the fact that whatever men might say of Governor Johnson in the way of harsh criticism concerning the Church Acts, even his enemies had to admit that he possessed great military ability. He had protected

Charles Town by land and sea as had no governor before him. French, Spaniard, and Indian would each alike find it a hard task to enter this strongly fortified city.

The English colors flew everywhere. How my heart bounded to see it! And conspicuously displayed from shipping, from battlement, and from housetop were the red crosses of St. George. Why, truly the city, as I surmised, must be arrayed for some festive occasion!

"Why, by gad, sir," suddenly exclaimed Sir Christopher, " 'tis no less than a prinking up for St. George's Day. To-morrow's the time, gentlemen. How could we have forgotten it?" and he lifted his hat. Then, as he swung it with a festive air, he piped forth at the top of his shrill voice, "God save the Queen! We shall have lively times to-morrow, gentlemen. The Governor's sure to be in town with his suite."

"Lively times? Yes, doubtless," muttered Major Popple, "but not one guinea has that devil of a pirate left us for the spending! Yet despite what the robber carried away, three bags full of the gold and jewels of gentlemen, he had the impudence to shout back at us that it was after all precious little wool he had gathered, as the devil had remarked when he sheared the hogs. To perdition with the black-hearted fiend; may he reach his rope's end speedily!"

" 'Tis a shame and an outrage upon the people of this Province," commented Master Mazyck, "that these villains are permitted to pursue their course of killing and robbing so near to the Carolina coasts. 'Tis intimated," here he lowered his voice, "that the bold rogues are so winked at by the authorities, they even land here in this city, in broad daytime, to carouse and rob with no fear of arrest."

We had by now come near to the wharf where we

were to land, just off the Half Moon Works, where grim cannon were mounted. So deep was this magnificent harbor that vessels of great draught could sail right up to the city and discharge their cargoes upon the wharves jutting out from the shore. Ships were there now from all parts of the world; some riding at anchor; others preparing to depart; others again were discharging or receiving cargo.

The wharves were a bustling scene, a heartening sight after the experiences of the sea. Bales and boxes, logs of cypress, pine and cedar wood; barrels of rice, casks of rum and sugar lay heaped in every direction. There was the intermingled din of the rattling of chains, the creaking of cordage, the trundling of barrows, and the hoarse shouts of men giving orders. Varied, too, was the assemblage of human beings, many of them come down to see our ship land. In this gathering were gaily-turbaned Africans, with great brass hoops in their ears, picturesquely attired Indians, with gay feathers stuck in their hair, important looking officials, gentlemen of leisure, and busy merchants, while now and then one caught the flash of the red and gold of the Queen's uniform.

With the others I moved across the gangway, and for the first time set foot upon Charles Town soil; but, unlike most of the others, I was in no haste to move on. Curiosity held me in thrall. I desired to see more of these strange black creatures upon the wharves, with their thick lips, flat noses, and woolly hair, the female portion of which were turbaned like Turks. Never before had I seen the like. The Indians, too, attracted me in their feathers and paint, though I took care to keep some distance away. They were, of a truth, most savage and forbidding looking. They were treacherous, too, I was sure, and the wonder was deep within me that the

authorities had opened the city's gates to them and permitted them here. But I learned afterwards that these were friendly Indians come to trade, and that one of the chief sources of revenue derived by the Carolinians, from the Governor down, was in the skins purchased from the Indians and shipped to the Mother Land.

I was curious, too, to see what would become of the white slaves, those miserable creatures who had arrived by the *Abigail and Anne.* I had not long to wait to have my curiosity satisfied. They were, for the most part, consigned to one Master William Pinckney, dealer in slaves, black and white. A bell and a crier were already announcing the arrival of these slaves. Some were to be sold at auction immediately; others were to be bound out; while some were to be held to await the appearance of masters to whom they had been already assigned. My heart surged with pity and with an indignation, too, which made me long to speak out and declare my thought of such proceeding. What a fate for men and women with the blood of the white race in their veins! Yet I felt it wise to forbear. I could not afford to court trouble thus newly-come to the Province, and friendless and well-nigh beggared as I was.

I turned me toward the streets, my first aim to find an inn where I could have food and housing. I had left a portion of my effects with the skipper of the *Abigail and Anne* until the morrow, so that I was in no wise overburdened as I went my way along the streets in search of a hostelry. I found one in Church Street, no more than a stone's throw or so from the Court of the Guard. 'Twas a new place, by name "The Three Nags," all showing spick and span, in a glory of bright paint, and with a sign hanging before its main entrance on which were three steeds in full gallop.

Having been fleeced by the pirate of most of my store

of guineas, I had to be cautious. Thus I solicited of the landlord one of the most modest of his apartments, and, after a space of climbing a somewhat wide flight of stairs, and then more very narrow ones, I found myself in a small room, perched high, directly under the eaves. It was small, but it was clean, and the bed appeared to invite to restful slumber. Its one window looked out over a narrow courtyard and across a wall into a churchyard, in which there were several tombs, one in particular conspicuous among the others. 'Twas of brick, of vault-like proportions, and there was a garland of faded roses lying upon it.

Even as I looked, there came into the churchyard two maidens, each bearing flowers, and attended by a tall black creature of almost giant-like stature, turbaned, and with great glittering hoops reaching almost to her shoulders.

She was chattering some kind of gibberish to them, and they were laughing gaily, undaunted by the gloom of the tombs among which they moved. As they neared the brick vault on which the faded wreath lay, the taller of the two maids lifted her head to glance upward, and I had full view of her face. Never had man's eyes looked upon fairer, nor God's hand fashioned lovelier. The sunlight gleamed upon her hair. 'Twas red-gold, like the heart of a flame. And the face was lovely beyond words. Never had I seen such grace and beauty in one woman. My heart began to pound, I knew not why. 'Twas a strange sensation that had seized upon me. Never had I felt such before. Scarce knowing what I did, I leaned out through the framing of the window, and stared and stared as any country bumpkin might have done.

The maid, absorbed in her task, saw me not at first. She removed the faded garland from the tomb and began

to arrange thereon the fresh blossoms. While she was engaged in this, a man came hastily through the gateway and approached with an assured and jaunty step. When within a few paces of where they stood, he called to them gaily, then stopped suddenly, and sweeping his plumed hat from his head with the air of a grand courtier, made them an obeisance that brought his dark ringleted head almost to the earth. That he was by no means old, that he was fashionably attired, and that he was as fine a figure of a man as ever I had seen, I was soon made aware. That he was also by no means an unwelcome intruder, I had evidence in the pleasure with which he was greeted. Of another fact, too, I came speedily into possession. While he had smiled upon each maid in turn, he now had eyes and ears for the taller one only, the maid with the red-gold hair.

Meanwhile, the other maid had moved apart and was chatting with the old black woman. She, too, was fair to look upon, but naught to compare to the other, being shorter, with tresses of brown, and a merry, even somewhat tomboyish manner.

As I stood gazing out of the window into the churchyard, held to the spot by the chains of an enchantment I could not understand, and that I strove in vain to shake off, the gallant suddenly looked up and saw me. A quick exclamation of annoyance escaped him. Then he called to me in slow, drawling tones:

"Well, my bumpkin, newly-come-to-town, what do you see to so transfix you? My soul, but you look like a lobster freshly speared!"

Both maids glanced up as attention was thus drawn to me. The shorter of the two laughed suddenly; a clear, merry laugh, that rang like the lilt of bird through the gloomy recesses of the churchyard. Not so the other. The look she gave me as she drew herself up haughtily

was like a blade piercing me through and through. Sharp, too, were the words she spoke. My heart, how those fair lips could sting!

"Lout!" she exclaimed. "Methinks your father's pigs would show better manners!"

I drew back, sorely wounded, overwhelmed. What had I done to be thus bitterly humiliated, and by one so fair? "My father's pigs with better manners," she had taunted, and I a baronet's son! Long I sat, my head between my hands, my heart cold within me. Was it thus I was to begin my life in the New World, stamped as an ill-favored bumpkin, as one below the level of the pigsty in manners, and by one so adorable? Ah, that was what made the sting go all the deeper! Because she was the most beautiful creature of her sex I had ever laid eyes on, and because I had worshipped her on sight, it hurt all the more.

The night fell as I sat there. The stars came out. Above the city a new moon hung, soft and silvery. There were many noises in the streets, the sounds of much revelry. Merry-makers were abroad. 'Twas apparent all the gayety would not be reserved for the morrow. I rose quickly, spurred by the resolve to go and look upon the merriment, if myself I could not engage in it.

Many people were abroad. The streets were filled with noisy throngs. There were soldiers from the fort, bantering and jesting; planters from their homes up the rivers; stockmen, Indian scouts; Indians themselves vivid in paint and feathers; roistering young blades, gallants of the town, bedecked as though on Cupid's errand; and others more sedate, with fair ones clinging to their arms, whom they were manfully striving to pilot safely through the boisterous, jostling crowds. There were, too, tipsy men from the ships in the harbor, some

of them bent on merry-making only, but others who were blustering with loud voices, and spoiling to pick a quarrel.

Now and then as I went onward through the throngs, I came face to face with one whose dark, evil look disturbed me not a little. I bethought me again of the words Master Mazyck had spoken concerning the pirates and the undisputed freedom of the town which was theirs. That more than one follower of the black flag was abroad this night, I did not doubt me; mayhap members of that very same black-hearted company that had fleeced us of money and valuables aboard the *Abigail and Anne*. I was seething with anger as I recalled this. Here was a pretty pickle in which that villain of a pirate chief had placed me! What the dickens did he want with those papers? And how was I to approach the Governor without them? Was it likely that he would take my plain, unvarnished word for it that I was the son of that Edward Ashton with whom he had gone a-soldiering in the cause of King James? I smiled in derision to myself, as I thought of the number of pretenders with whom he must come in contact from time to time, in this land of arch-deceivers and mountebank adventurers. Nevertheless, I made resolve to put the matter to the test on the day after the morrow. The Governor would then be through with the festivities for which he had come to town, and would no doubt be returning to his plantation, "Silk Hope," as I had learned was the name of it, some thirty miles up the river.

Having come to this resolve, I dismissed all unpleasant thoughts from my mind, and began to pass quip and jest, and otherwise to make merry with the crowd around me. But I soon tired of this, for I truly had no heart for it, and so determined to return to the inn. By

now the evening meal must be spread, and as I quickly discovered, I was ravenously hungry for it.

As I came opposite the mouth of an alley, that lay alongside the inn, a man carrying a burden in his arms suddenly stumbled against me, and we both went lunging toward the wall of the building. I had no more than recovered my balance when he thrust the burden he was carrying into my arms, saying in thick, hoarse voice:

"Take it quickly, sir! There, man, don't let it go! Don't you see I—I am—faint? I am—am ill! I fear me I am—am dying!"

He sank to the ground as the last words were gasped out, and I stood as one dazed, holding the burden he had so suddenly thrust into my arms, which I now saw was a large covered basket.

"Put it down, sir!" called a voice from somewhere out of the darkness. "Have nothing to do with it! 'Tis a bastard brat, and no less!"

A great shout now went up. A knot of roisterers separated and began to surround me. A bold fellow, with a daredevil air, leaned over, and grasping a card that swung from the basket, read out the lines inscribed thereon in the voice of the auction houses:

"Take me in and treat me well,
For near this spot my dad doth dwell."

Wild shouts of mirth greeted the reading of this card, while the same bold fellow cried:

"Lord, sir, what a neat trick the fellow played you! But drop the basket, man, if you don't want the brat shoved off on you!"

All this time I stood, like the loony I no doubt was, holding the basket clutched against me, while my eyes roved here and there in search of the villain who had

proclaimed himself dying; but all in vain. As I might have known would be the case, he had disappeared.

Too late now I saw that it was a trick. Something was stirring within the basket, and there was a feeble cry.

Scarce knowing what I did, I pried apart the fastening securing the lid and pressed it back. As I did so I saw, lying at the bottom of the basket, cowed and trembling, not the outcast infant I had feared to find, but a miserable looking small dog of the spaniel breed, gaunt, faint from hunger, and near to death from terror.

I let the basket fall in my amazement, but not the dog. My hand lifted it as the basket fell and it now lay against my breast. As I gazed upon it with pitying eyes, it raised its own eyes to my face with a look of love and trust so human, it stirred my heart. Not so many times had glance of love been mine that I should now lightly regard it, even in the eyes of so forlorn a creature.

"Little dog," I said, as I stroked its head, "you have gone hungering for love all your days; but, please God, you shall not any more," and as I said it, with head bent down, I felt a soft tongue in ecstasy of love against my cheek.

By this time the crowd around me had fair gone mad with mirth and were passing from lip to lip all manner of jokes at my expense. But I cared naught. With the little dog clasped in my arms, I sought to make my way toward the entrance of the inn, when a sweet high-pitched voice, seeming to come out of the sky above me, asked:

"Sir, you will keep the little dog? You will not abandon it?"

I was standing in the yellow glare of the great lantern swinging above me. Thus, for the moment, I was

blinded by the light. But, shading my eyes with my hand, I looked upward, and there, leaning from the window of the inn, with the mellow glow of candles behind her, was the mischievous, tomboyish maid I had seen in the churchyard that afternoon, she who had found so much of mirth at my expense. But there was no hint of laughter now in face and words. 'Twas, I thought, a somewhat serious face she bent toward me; and truly was her manner one of earnestness.

Astonishment held me dumb for a space, then I found voice to reply.

"Yes, mistress, I shall keep the little dog," and again I stroked the head of the delighted creature.

She showed her pleasure at the words.

" 'Tis a fair deed, sir," she said, "and I for one am glad the poor mite has found a friend." Then with somewhat of the merry manner I had noticed of her in the churchyard, she queried:

"But what will you call it, sir? Assuredly must it have a name."

I looked up boldly, and seeing the eyes of the maid now dancing with mischief, made brave reply:

"Truly, mistress, a name it must have; and, as I am a poor, witless fellow,"—I bethought me now that she would be sure to recall the scene of the afternoon,— "with no more of resource of my own than of manners, will you not take pity upon my stupidity and bestow upon the little dog a name?"

"That I will right gladly, sir." Then, as her eyes dropped demurely, she added, "Truly I think, sir, that—that Cupid will be a most befitting name."

"Verily, mistress, thus think I also," I replied, and in as careless a voice as I could command, for now had I the feeling that the little vixen did but poke fun at me; "and Cupid it shall be."

A voice within the room now called to her. She dropped me a courtesy, and the next moment the merry face was gone from my view, but not before she had given me a glance that did greatly confuse me.

CHAPTER IV

I EXPERIENCE FURTHER OF FORTUNE'S FROWNS

"CUPID!" Such was the name that merry minx had bestowed upon the dog, and now was I assured of the fact that she had meant to have amusement at my expense, because of my love-lorn state that afternoon when I had peered from my window upon the scene in the churchyard. The thought did greatly nettle me; and I then and there swore roundly to myself that never again should she or any other fair one have cause to name me bumpkin, ill-mannered lout, or aught of the like. Little I knew, as I thus hotly resolved, what further of abasement ill fortune had in store for me.

I turned my step toward a shop near by, and there made purchase of biscuits and other store of food for my little Cupid. Then I sought my room under the eaves, and, placing cautious supply beneath the nose of the famished waif, left him to the ravenous enjoyment of it.

My own stomach pinching me by now, I made haste to find food. There was a babel of voices in the common room of the inn. Some were supping soberly and holding converse in grave tones; but for the most part it was a roistering crowd, making merry over the cups. The apartment I now entered, with an eye open for some secluded nook, wherein I could sup with no other company than my own thoughts, was large and high-ceiled and heavily panelled in oak. Around it on three sides ran a gallery, from which doors opened upon sleeping rooms, and which was reached from below by a broad flight of heavily-balustered stairs.

I found a table in a corner at which no one was being

served, and, sitting down, gave orders for the food I desired. I had barely done so, when a loud clatter of glasses attracted my attention. A half dozen or so of gay young blades at a table near by were drinking toasts and entertaining each other by the recital of tales of questionable exploit. As I neared the end of my meal, I noted that the voices had changed. They were now hotly discussing affairs of the Province. I feared me a quarrel was about to break forth. Even as I so feared, the storm burst.

High above the hubbub a voice rang out:

"A toast, gentlemen, a toast! To His Excellency, Sir Nathaniel Johnson, soldier and gentleman—and none better, God bless him—by the grace of God and the will of Her Majesty, Governor of Carolina!"

The voice of the toast-giver was now drowned in a clamor of shouts and curses, and the glass was struck from his hand.

"We drink not to such tyrant!" one cried loud above the din.

"Nay, we will not," added another, "rather let us drink to the freemen of this Province, who are not to be driven by a tyrant's rod!"

"Yea, by the Almighty," broke forth a third speaker, "the foundation stone of this colony is human liberty, and we won't see it overturned! We'll take to the sword first!"

But all were not against the Governor. I could hear other voices acclaiming his praise. Matters were like to grow serious, I thought, and I made haste to finish my meal, that thus I might get free of the brawling. But I need not to so have disturbed myself, for even as I planned retreat, the landlord of the Three Nags, a burly, brawny man, bore down upon them.

"Come, my fiery young blades, there must be an end

to this uproar!" he commanded. "Sit down and conduct yourselves as gentlemen, or you leave this inn on the instant. Hast lost sight of the fact," he continued, transfixing them with his eye, "that His Excellency himself is in the house, and likely at any minute to overhear you? In the name of decency, then, desist from your foul speech!"

This and much more he said to them, and they were soon silenced and scattered. But two of them remained; one the fellow who had proposed the toast. I could see that he was now pretty far gone in his cups, and, despite the landlord, was disposed to continue in quarrelsome mood. Detecting my glance at him, he rose suddenly and came toward me, with a half drunken swagger, his hand on the hilt of his sword.

"By the Lord Harry, sir, why are you staring at me thus? Didst hear the toast and wilt drink it? Come, fill up the glasses. Show your colors, sir! Are you for the Governor, or those devilish-mouthed, mischief-making Dissenters with their bastard religion? Come, drink the toast, sir, or I will run you through as I would any other cowardly poltroon!"

I sprang up as he advanced upon me, and my hand sought my own sword. Not that I desired fight with him, but because I wished to parry his drunken thrusts, having no fancy to be pinked by him.

As I did so, I found, to my astonishment, no blade in the scabbard. At the same moment an amused laugh assailed my ears, and turning quickly I saw sitting there beside the seat I had just quitted, the same gentleman my eyes had beheld with the maids in the churchyard.

"Come, sit down," he said in rich, musical tones, with the softness of velvet running through them, "there is no need of weapon. Yon is but a drunken blusterer.

Curs that yap so loud, seldom bite. Behold now that I address him, with what alacrity he'll slink away."

With this he fastened upon the tipsy brawler eyes black, deep and piercing, in a look the arch-fiend himself might envy. I felt my blood chill as I saw it.

"Begone, you fool!" he said in the same silky tones, but beneath them was the ring of steel. "Thou art an ass even to thy bray. Begone! quaff your own toasts, and leave gentlemen to drink theirs as best it suits them."

Under the gaze of that mastering eye, the brawler slunk away, and I sat down as I had been bidden, almost as speedily obedient as the cowed young brawler who had crept away like a whipped cur. I was nigh to gasping in my amazement, for, in addition to what I had already seen and heard, there sat this most astonishing man with my sword in his hand and eyeing it meditatively. How in Satan's name had he removed it from its scabbard without my knowledge and in so brief a time? And in the name of the same Fiend of Darkness, who and what was he anyhow?

"Henry Langdon, at your service, sir," he said as promptly as though I had spoken the thought aloud; "otherwise Harry, or the Old Harry, just as you please," then he laughed derisively as he saw me go white.

The man not only repelled, but drew me also. I felt myself gazing with fascination upon his handsome face, well-bronzed by the sun, upon the comely figure adorned in the plumage of a peacock of fashion. When I had seen him in the churchyard no thought had come to me that ever I had laid eyes on him before. But what was there now about his gestures, in the trick he had of throwing his head to one side, in the curling of the lip upward, in the nervous movement of the fingers, above

all in the piercing glance of the eyes he now fixed upon me that struck me with a sense of familiarity? Where had I met up with him before?

His hands were busy now, after having placed the sword on the table between us, with the adjustment of his ruffles, and the careful flicking away of the few specks of powder that had settled upon his magnificently embroidered waistcoat.

"A pretty weapon," he said, his eyes glancing again at the sword. "Fashioned in some far Eastern land, if I mistake not. And that chasing! where do you see such nowadays?" He bent above the beautiful weapon again, studying it intently. Then swiftly he raised himself and gazed hard at me, at the same time pointing to the name engraved upon the sword's hilt.

"Yours, I take it?" he said.

"My father's and his father's before him," I answered curtly. What concern of his was it to so question me?

My blood was beginning to boil at his impudence. How dared he remove the sword from the scabbard, and how, in Satan's name, had he accomplished it without my knowing? Besides, I held still further score against him in the trick he had played me while in the churchyard. But for the mocking words with which he had drawn attention to me, I had not been so stung to mortification by the stinging words of the maid who had drawn out my heart in worship.

"Keep cool," he said, eyeing me with irritating composure. "Anger is bad for digestion. Besides, I meant no offense. The hilt of the sword attracted me. I know something of the sleight-of-hand art, and the notion seized me to see if I could remove it without your knowledge."

"When the dickens did you do it?"

"While you sat there eating. Just before you rose to meet that swashbuckler."

"And you were sitting there ere I rose?" I queried, astonished that I had not known it.

"Yes, for full two minutes," he replied with a smile, evidently both amused at and flattered by my amazement. "But come, there's no occasion for anger on your part. 'Twas just a prank such as I often play. So there's a gentleman's apology, sir, and my hand on it into the bargain."

The words were fair enough; so, too, his manner. He seemed a gentleman, though a somewhat foppish one. No doubt he was the spoiled darling of silly women.

I returned the hand-clasp, but in no hearty manner. There was still the occurrence of the afternoon. That rankled deep; far deeper than aught else. I was about to break forth concerning it, when a sudden thought restrained me. Mayhap he had not connected me with that incident; had not recognized in me the man stigmatized as "lout" and "bumpkin." His glance had been but a hasty one, as I now recalled, and his eyes were so clearly all for the lovely creature beside him, 'twas not likely they had seen more in me than the mere form of a man.

"I take it that you are new come from England?"

His question broke upon my musing.

"I came but this day by the *Abigail and Anne.*"

"Seek you home here in this new land?"

Again the question was no more than one gentleman would ask of another recently arrived in the Province, yet somehow I resented it. In my view of it he was showing too deep a concern in my affairs.

"Nay, I come upon a quest." I was angered with myself the next moment that I had so answered him, but there had been that in his eyes that had drawn out the

admission. Then, to be sure, what reason was there for secrecy? Rather should I seek to make known the nature of my quest. Thus might I the more quickly be led to my brother.

His eyes studied me intently for a brief space.

"Hast come in search of the gold that fool's tales have made believe drop from the rocks here; that can be dug from the roots of trees, and even picked up in the streets?"

"Nay, I seek not gold," I replied, somewhat irritated by his flippancy. "My quest is to find my brother."

"Thy brother?"

"Yea, my brother, my only brother, Edward Ashton, of Ashtonholme in Sussex. Hast heard of any one of such name hereabouts, sir?"

The glance he now bent upon me was the most searching of all he had yet given me, then he spoke.

"I have not. But what brings you to search for your brother?"

"My father, sir. 'Tis all for him. His heart is nigh broken over my brother's absence. More than twelve years agone my brother went away, and not one word has he sent back in all that time."

He strummed upon the table in a somewhat absent manner, I thought.

"Then your brother is assuredly dead," he said at length. "Can you doubt it after the silence of so many years?"

"So I sometimes think, but my father will not believe it. You cannot convince him but that my brother is still alive, yet unable to communicate with us."

"You mean ——?"

"He thinks my brother has been thrown into prison on some false charge; that he has made enemies who have wrought him this evil."

"'Tis not unlikely," he said slowly. "Such things have happened; and are happening to-day. A wild, strange land this is; in many respects still a wilderness, and men dwell here with instincts as savage as the red denizens of the forest. I give you thanks for your confidence," he continued, and now I was amazed by the earnestness with which he spoke.

"How have you thought of proceeding in the search for your brother?" he asked, after a pause.

"Alas, I do not now know! Up to three days ago, it seemed all well planned. I had letters from my father to His Excellency, Governor Johnson, which besought his aid in the quest. They soldiered together for King James. But now I see little prospect of getting the Governor's ear."

He threw me a glance of enquiry.

"How happens it so?" he queried somewhat abruptly.

"The letters have been stolen from me. Two days ago we fell in with a pirate craft. The robber chief himself paid his respects to me. He relieved me not only of the greater part of my store of gold, but also of the letters."

"What in Satan's name did he want with the letters?" he exclaimed sharply.

"Of what fashion was this pirate chief?" he asked suddenly, his black eyes gleaming upon me.

I started as he gave me the look.

"Why, now I come to think of it, of somewhat the same fashion as yourself!" I answered boldly. Then in a flash I saw it all! The eyes, the movements, the air of jauntiness, the foppish attire! The peruke of curling black locks had been exchanged for one of dark brown hair; but that made no difference. It was all quite plain to me now. "Come, give them back to me," I said as bravely as I could. "God knows they can't be of any

value to you, and they mean everything to me. Keep the gold, and welcome, but give me back the letters."

He stared at me, swearing under his breath, then he ripped out:

"God! man, you take me for the pirate? Why, your pate is completely cracked!"

"Give me back the letters," I plead, "and I will say no more."

He raised his clinched fist menacingly.

"Stop your fool prating! By the Lord Harry, sir, you are no more than a blathering idiot! Now, listen to me. If you ever hint such a thing again that I, Henry Langdon, planter of Goose Creek, member of the Governor's Council, Head of the Committee of Safety, am chief of a piratical crew, I'll run you through where you stand. Come, now, look at me and answer as a man of sense. Was this pirate chief a swaggering fellow, with curling moustaches, scented love-locks, and dandified apparel? Did he speak with a low drawling voice, and mince his oaths?"

"Yea," said I, "he was all that, as you seem to know well," and looked at him again significantly.

He caught my arm roughly.

"Come, fool, let us get into the air. Your brain needs cooling. Come, there's music without, let's go list to it. Do you not recall," he continued animatedly, and raising his voice as we passed through the rooms, "what Master Shakespeare says? 'The man who has no music in himself, nor is not moved by concord of sweet sounds, is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils.' Am I not right in thinking you were bred to love music?"

Thus he kept up a rattle of talk until we arrived at the door opening into the street.

The music was well worth listening to, and I was soon following it with pleasure, despite the tumultuous

thoughts that had assailed me. To my astonishment, the musicians were all Indians. I had never seen such a sight before nor believed such possible, and from the exclamations I heard all around me, it was a strange scene to others as well. They had drum, fife, and violins, and never had I listened to strains more entrancing. They were playing chiefly for the ladies gathered in the balcony of the inn.

Questions were passed from lip to lip. "To what tribe belonged these Indians?" "Whence had they come?" "Who had taught them thus to perform?" " 'Twas most marvelous!"

My companion bent nearer and addressed me:

"A secret! Let me whisper it in your ear! 'Tis said these Indians are the musicians of a great white chief who has acquired wondrous power over certain tribes. He it is who has taught them, for he is himself gifted in music. He dwells among them, arrays himself in their attire, and is reported fabulously wealthy. For 'tis the Indians, let me make known to you," and his voice dropped to a still more mysterious tone, "who hold the keys to the treasure houses of this El Dorado."

After a time I missed the sound of his voice. I had been so engrossed with the performing of the Indians, I had paid but small heed to his occasional remarks. Now, having had from him no recent words, I turned me about to look for him, but nowhere was he to be seen. It was evident that he had stolen away in the crowd. Had he purposely led me without thus to escape me? Certes! he was a cunning as well as a daring rogue! But I would yet unmask him; he should not escape me. "Planter of Goose Creek and member of the Governor's Council," forsooth! 'Twas easy enough, I was sure, to prove him brother to Ananias, and to this effect would I make enquiry on the morrow.

The Indian band had now ceased its music and was going away. The throng in front of the inn began to thin. I bethought me suddenly of my little Cupid. I would go see how he fared. Mayhap his soft tongue against my cheek would soothe in part the ache of home-sickness.

I was some paces away from the main door of the Three Nags. I had turned to make my way toward it, when suddenly I was surrounded by a company of young roisterers primed for sport. They caught me and shoved me here and there, as though I were a bale of goods, and slapped me on the back, and prodded me in the ribs, and tossed my hat into the street, shouting at me all manner of ribald jests. Then one, catching me by the shoulders, commanded:

"Come, come, sirrah! Open your mouth, unloose your tongue and shout to Bacchus, for 'tis he and he alone who rules this realm to-night!"

In vain I strove to free myself; they had gone mad with devilment. Directly another burly young rascal, gripping me with a vigor that would have done credit to the sinews of Vulcan himself, sent me spinning toward the doorway of the inn. I reeled onward, expecting every second to plunge headlong to the earth. Alas, for me! 'twould have been a thousand times better had I sprawled my full length in the street. At the very instant the young devil had sent me hurtling forward, a gentleman and three ladies were nearing the inn door for the purpose of entering. With a gasp of horror I realized what must assuredly happen unless I could check myself in time. But 'twas not in the power of mortal man to accomplish. The wretch had sent me forward with a momentum no will or effort of mine could check till its force was expended. I lunged heavily against the gentleman, rebounded, reeled like a

man in full cups, made frantic efforts to come to a stand; but to no purpose. Down I went, sprawling like a lobster, against the soft silken folds of a lady's gown, rending the fabric with a sound, to me, as though all the gowns of all the women in the universe had been ripped asunder. I almost carried the lady herself down with me in the mad plunge. But for the quick hand of the gentleman, who grasped and held her, this would surely have been the case.

I caught one glimpse of an amazed and haughty face, saw the gleam of red-gold hair in the lantern light, heard feminine shrieks of dismay, then for the second time a voice that could cut like steel:

"Gra'mercy! 'tis the same lout that did stare upon us from the window of the inn! Of a verity, fellow, you are more swine than lout! Truly, I am beset by you! Couldst find no other place for your carousals save upon a lady's petticoats?"

I made desperate effort to release myself but could not, for the hilt of my sword had caught in the lace of the lady's gown and pinioned me. I floundered like some great fish caught in a net. Lord, what a sight I must have presented! The mortification of it swept over me like a flame; then I felt myself grow cold. I could hear poorly-suppressed titterings in feminine voices and guffaws of laughter from loud-mouthed jackasses congregated about.

I made further desperate effort to rise, and now succeeded in lifting my head and shoulders but not my eyes. Had my life depended upon it, I could not have done it, for I knew that her eyes were fastened upon my face. She must have seen my cheeks burning with shame. What no doubt others looked upon as comedy was tragedy to me.

"Have all lost their wits?" cried the imperious voice

again. "Is there no one who will remove the clodhopper and thus release me?"

Speedily upon this rough hands seized me, and I was soon jerked to my feet, with the result that the beautiful silken gown was subjected to further disaster. Lord, how angry she was! I could feel the fire from her eyes scorching my face. I could hear, too, her half-smothered exclamations over the ruined gown, as though she were quite too angry to control her voice. Of a truth, I could not blame her.

"Mistress," I began in the steadiest voice I could command, "I pray your pardon for what was no fault of mine. Tipsy revelers caught and pushed me thither. I could not stay myself in time. Tell me how I can make amends, I beseech you."

She deigned me no reply, but I heard a sweet, high-pitched voice from somewhere near at hand exclaim:

" 'Tis too bad not to forgive him, when to all appearances he is a gentleman and speaks the truth."

I was turning about, emboldened now to raise my head to see whence came such advocacy of my wretched cause, when a man's hand seized and shook me roughly, while a voice as rough as the hand demanded:

"Seest not the Governor, man? Where are your manners? Turn back and make obeisance. Certes! thou art fledgling of a clown!"

The Governor! The man of all others before whom I wished to make pleasing appearance! And now here I stood, covered with shame and mortification, the miserable actor in a scene most humiliating. I managed to raise my head now, but 'twas a sorry attempt at manly front. My eyes rested upon the Governor. 'Twas he who was in attendance upon the bevy of fair ones, he against whom I had so heavily lunged at my last desperate effort to recover myself.

I saw before me a man well on in years, but straight and vigorous, with every suggestion of the soldier in his carriage, though he was no more than of medium height. "The grim old knight," he was often called, but I could see naught of grimness in the features now turned toward me, despite that the nose was high-arched, the features finely chiseled, and the lips thin and flexible. He was richly dressed, as became his station, and the eyes now gazing upon me were very bright and keenly alert. Evidently he waited for me to speak.

"Your Excellency," I began so soon as I could command my voice, "I beg you to believe that I am in no wise to blame for what has occurred. The matter is just as I have stated. I beg you, too, to believe that I am a gentleman, and not the lout I have been made to appear. For the damage I have been so unfortunate as to cause, I beseech the leniency of yourself and—and the lady to whom I have unwittingly done injury." With that I turned and walked away with what dignity I could summon, my heart beating in a tumult.

CHAPTER V

I OWN TO A CONFUSION OF THOUGHTS

I WALKED away, my head held high, my heart hammering in my breast. Thoughts were surging hot within me. I had again, to all appearances, shown myself a lout, an ill-mannered bumpkin; had played the fool before the woman with whom I had fallen madly in love. A scorching flame of mortification swept over me. Even my little Cupid, who hailed my return with frantic joy, could not comfort me.

'Twas a golden world on which I looked the next morning, and I resolved to enjoy it. Despite disturbing dreams, I had had a refreshing amount of sleep. I felt young again and hopeful. I had even reached the point where I could see the ludicrousness of the affair of the evening before, could even laugh heartily over it. Lord! what a sight I must have presented! But as I recalled the damaged gown, my mirth subsided. That was a serious phase of the matter, and as I pondered it, my lightness fled. It was one of those predicaments for which a gentleman, however willing, has no way of making amends.

I stood for a few minutes at my window, inhaling long, deep draughts of the glorious air, fresh from the sea. 'Twas like the effect of old wine in the veins. Then coddling Cupid again, and whispering all manner of foolish things to him, I went down to breakfast, seeking the same table at which I had sat the evening before. I had no more than ordered my meal, when, both to my annoyance and surprise, Master Henry Langdon, as he called himself, moved up with an assured air, and dropped into the seat beside me.

"Fine morning for the sports," he remarked, and with a freedom of manner such as would have been used toward an old acquaintance.

I resented the familiarity with which he addressed me, and so gave him but a cool nod in response.

"The town is already crowded," he remarked again, "and still the people come. 'Twill soon be like a hive near to bursting with bees."

Again I gave him no other reply save a nod of the head.

He turned and stared at me. I could feel his eyes upon my face, for I had not looked up.

"Zounds!" he ejaculated, "are you still playing the young fool? Are you still holding it in your mind that I am that gentleman rover who deprived you of your valuables?"

Now I looked at him, and with steady glance.

"Are you not?" I asked.

A fleck of color appeared in either cheek. Then he demanded angrily:

"What the devil put such a thought into your pate? 'Tis surely cracked. To what am I indebted for this—ah, honor," sarcastically, "you are doing me, sir, in consigning me to membership in a black flag crew?"

"The evidence of my own eyes," I replied boldly.

I heard him swear under his breath, then he uttered words, only one or two which I caught. His eyes were blazing and his teeth bit viciously at a corner of his lip. I wondered at my own boldness, but the loss of my papers had rendered me desperate.

"What!" he cried, "you dare to infer that I am that swaggering, black-moustached villain who robbed you and others of their valuables three days ago aboard the *Abigail and Anne?*"

As he spoke, his hand went up, significantly, I thought,

to his lips and chin, now fresh from the scrape of the barber's razor.

"Moustaches are sometimes easy things to put on and off at pleasure," I said ironically.

He gave me a look that, if it had been thrust of sword, would have surely slain me.

"By the Lord Harry!" he blazed, as he brought his fist down upon the table, "this must be ended! Once for all, I tell you, I am no pirate chief; that I know naught of the papers you profess to have lost. And once again I say to you—yea, for all time, sir," and now there was a threatening gleam in his eyes, "that I am he who I said I am, Henry Langdon, gentleman planter of Goose Creek, member of the Governor's Council; Captain of the Goose Creek Militia; he and no other, sir; and damme, sir," he broke off hotly, "if you don't believe it, go and prove it otherwise, sir!"

"As I intend doing," I replied coolly.

He burst out laughing. All his anger seemed to have flown in a moment. What he saw in my face or detected in my answer to amuse him I knew not; but 'twas evident that in me and naught else he found source for his mirth.

"Come," he said, and his sudden assumption of good nature surprised me, "we have had enough of this fool's play. 'Tis quite plain to see that you are a youngling in the ways of the world. Why, man," he continued, and now I wondered again, this time at his earnestness, "with other than myself your rash speech would have spelled your doom."

I gave him intent look. He was either a most consummate actor or else a man speaking his earnest conviction. For the first time doubt assailed me. Had I done him a foul wrong after all? Was he, in truth, the gentleman he claimed to be?

He saw the change wrought in me, and said approvingly:

"I see you are beginning to take a more sensible view of the matter," and I was amazed by the pleasantness of his tones. Was this only another clever bit of acting? As though he read my thoughts, he continued:

"To show you that I cherish no ill will against you, that I am serene in the thought that you will soon discover your error, and, like a gentleman, apologize for it, I propose to give you a hand in the sports to-day."

I glanced at him enquiringly.

"There's to be rare sport and of many kinds," he continued, "outside the military parades and reviews; tournaments, foot races, wrestling matches, sword tilts, and the like. I take it that, as you are a stranger but newly arrived in town, and unacquainted so far, 'twill be rather a sorry day for you unless some good Samaritan, myself for instance," tapping himself approvingly, "takes pity on you and helps you to a share of the merriment afoot."

"I am grateful——" I began.

"Nay; there's no need for such expression," he interrupted. "Wait till the day is over. You may not then have cause for gratitude."

I gave him a quick look.

"You mean——?"

"Nothing to alarm you. You may get a broken arm or a twisted nose in the wrestling bout; or a pink in the side, or mayhap a slash in the face, if you enter the sword contests, just enough to mar your good looks for a time; but I have in mind nothing more alarming, I assure you."

I didn't fancy his light, bantering tones, and I soon let him see it.

"You no doubt put small estimate upon my ability in

either direction," I said, somewhat hotly, stung by his manner; "but I am no raw hand with the sword, as you'll soon discover if you desire to make test of the matter."

" 'Twould be a foul shame if you were with such blade as that in your possession," and I could see his eyes rest covetously upon the fine weapon at my side.

No doubt he was deeply regretting that he had not laid hand upon this also when he had robbed me of all else aboard the *Abigail and Anne*. By which thought 'twill be seen that my mind would hark back to the conviction that he and the swaggering, black-moustached villain who had fleeced me were one and the same. But truly here was he now treating me as one gentleman another and showing the fine trait of taking pity on my loneliness in a strange land.

"Come," he said after some moments, "let's have a pipe together."

As he spoke, he pushed toward me a box of sweet-scented tobacco. 'Twas as fine a weed as ever I had smoked, and I soon let him see my enjoyment of it.

" 'Tis but lately come from Virginia," he told me.

After giving me some very clear directions and a few lines, which I was to present to the Master of the Sports in the event that he, Langdon, did not turn up ere the amusements began, he went away.

The sports were not to take place until the afternoon. For the morning there was to be a military parade, a review of the troops on the Green by the Governor, and an attack on a mock fort by the Queen's Guards and the Royal Volunteers. At noon a feast, over which the Governor would preside, would be spread for the visiting Indians. On the Green, promptly at two o' the clock, as was announced, the sports would begin. All this I had

very clear in my mind, for I had read it again and again posted on the walls of the Three Nags Inn.

'Twas a joy that tingled in the veins to be abroad on such a morning. The air came from the sea with the sharp tang of salt. The sun shone with dazzling brightness upon the roofs and spires, against the white sails in the broad, beautiful harbor, kindling into deeper glow the red tiles of the houses embowered in their gardens of green, from which came the mingled scents of all manner of sweet-growing things. Truly, the spring time had burst forth with gladness in this fair land of Carolina.

The shops were gay with all sorts of goods newly arrived from many parts of the Mother Land, while everywhere were streamers and festoons of adornment, with the red cross of St. George flying from well-nigh every building.

As early as was the hour, the streets were already thronged. Tongues were busy on all sides. Some were clacking with gossip; others called out in merry salutations; but for the most part, as I soon discovered, they were wagging fast and furious in contention over political affairs. 'Twas all concerning my Lord Granville, the Governor, and their policies, though now and then I could hear a voice raised in derision, speaking of "Penny Barons," the so-called nobles, men of yeoman ancestry, who had bought their titles here in the Province, patented to order, some as low as one hundred pounds apiece.

There was certainly trouble brewing for the Governor. I realized it with dismay. For the most part men spoke against him, and their words were bitter; yet now and again, one, carried away by his patriotism and enthusiasm, would shout aloud for "The Grand Old Knight"! I caught, too, murmurs of uneasiness. Certain disturbing rumors were afloat. The Spaniards had

been stirring up the Indians of the interior against the Carolinians. The Spanish garrison at St. Augustine, in Florida, in company with the French, was preparing, it was believed, to attack Charles Town by sea; while their Indian allies fell upon the City by land.

"Let them come!" cried a voice boldly. "They will find out then that our Governor knows how to get ready for them. There's a soldier for you, sirs, and no mistake! There is not a more strongly fortified city in the New World than this one, and it's all the Governor's doings."

Varied were the comments that fell upon my ears as I moved onward through the jostling throngs, slowly, because of the press.

Many fair ones, I noted, wore the Governor's colors, blue and gold, a streamer of ribbon, and pinned upon it a cluster of small but odorous flowers, of golden hue, which, I was told, was the yellow jessamine. It grew not only in gardens, but wild and luxuriantly at this season all through the forests. Balconies and windows, as well as streets, were filled with festive groups, principally of the fair sex, looking down upon the merry scenes. My eyes searched each balcony, each window greedily, in ardent hope that in some one of them I might behold again the Lady of my Heart, beautiful and imperious. I knew not the name by which others called her, but, God favoring me, I meant to learn it. I meant, too, to stand beside her, my head up, and look into her eyes, unflinching. My heart leapt at the thought that mayhap ere this day was over, I should have opportunity to prove myself a man before her eyes. Please God, if my trusty blade and my own good arm did not fail me, I would, ere many hours, show my Lady Disdain what manner of man it was who, heretofore, had received but her contempt and her scorn.

As I made my way toward the main thoroughfare, I heard the bugle-call loud and clear, and knew it for the signal to the troops to begin moving. 'Twas a sight on which I longed to gaze, so hurried forward, hoping to gain a point of vantage from which I might look upon the various companies as they passed. The military spirit of the Province, I had learned, was at high tide. The Governor himself, a master of the soldier's art, had fostered it in every way his experience and ingenuity could suggest.

Shortly, I found a position to my liking. 'Twas at the top of a pile of brick thrown down near to a building in course of erection. Several other eager sightseers shared it with me. Back of me was a balcony filled with chattering fair ones, each voluble in praise of her favorite company of foot or horse. Much I heard of "the Goose Creek men." Evidently, this was the favorite company. What was it that made the name so familiar to me? Then I remembered. Langdon had declared he was a planter of Goose Creek, and Captain of the Militia. Moreover, 'twas the Governor's place of residence, and that of the men for whom I heard such praise formed, as I soon learned, the Governor's own company of Guards.

Directly the head of the parade came into view, the cornets leading, then the drummers and fife-players. Back of them rode Colonel William Rhett, colonel of the militia and vice-admiral of the fleet, and with him his staff of dashing young officers; the same Colonel Rhett who was to bring such renown to the Carolina Province through his daring military deeds and the extermination of the pirates.

Company after company they came; first the Horse Guards, then the Queen's Grenadiers, next them the Royal Volunteers, then I heard murmurs growing louder and louder until voices broke into shouts:

"The Goose Creek men! The Goose Creek men! Here they come! By St. George, we shall see soldiers now!"

The fair ones in the balcony behind me had risen to their feet and were now leaning over the railings, their handkerchiefs fluttering. The whole street had caught the excitement. Opposite me was another balcony filled with the fair sex. They, too, had arisen, and with waving handkerchiefs awaited the appearance of the Goose Creek company.

And now they were coming, were in sight; sturdy, brawny men the most of them were, bronzed by the sun; yet among them were others of fairer skin, with more the appearance of carpet knights, yet all with a soldierly air. They were finely accoutered, and they marched with steady, unbroken step, their bodies swaying as one man. In command was a tall figure, almost the tallest one among them, a man of splendid carriage. There was something familiar about this figure even before I saw his face.

"Captain Langdon!" spoke a voice beside me. "Lord! what a soldier he is! Even the Governor himself suffers by contrast!"

The name startled me, and at the same moment I caught sight of his face. 'Twas my acquaintance of the Three Nags! my companion at table; the man I had accused of sailing under the black flag! And here he was publicly acclaimed as Captain of the Goose Creek Company, the finest military organization of the Province, the Governor's own Guards. Lord! no wonder his anger had flamed hot against me. I trembled as I thought of it.

I saw him now, without breaking his soldier step, turn his head and gaze toward the balcony opposite to where I stood. I followed the gaze and felt my heart leap to

my throat. There, standing in full view in the midst of a bevy of fair ones, all arrayed as Dame Fashion of that period decreed, was my Lady of the red-gold hair. Unlike the others, she was dressed wholly in white, with just a dash of color in the red, red roses glowing against her breast. As I looked, she detached one of these roses from the lace at her throat and tossed it with the utmost grace toward the man whose uplifted face was smilingly regarding her. It was thrown dexterously, with splendid aim, and as dexterously he caught it, and in his plumed hat, which the moment before he had removed from his head. Then, with a courtier's bow of acknowledgment, he passed on without breaking his step. And now other flowers from hands of other fair ones quickly followed the flight of the one red rose, Beauty's offering at the shrine of the Goose Creek Company.

I had no more interest in the parade. I had seen that which made my heart go hot within me. I burned with the desire to spring into the street and throttle the villain who now passed on with such an air of assurance, for, despite all the evidence in his favor, I was again convinced that he was none other than that same swaggering black-moustached commander of the pirate crew who had fleeced us aboard the *Abigail and Anne.*

CHAPTER VI

I ENGAGE IN THE SPORTS OF ST. GEORGE'S DAY

I RETURNED to the Three Nags for my noon meal. An hour later found me approaching the Green, where the sports were to be held. It was yet a half hour to the opening, but hundreds of spectators had already assembled. After some delay, I succeeded in finding the Master of the Sports and presenting him with the lines Langdon had written.

I had pondered long the question as to whether I should so proceed. My hot anger against the man calling himself Henry Langdon, whom I still believed, spite of the evidence, to be the leader of a pirate crew, and whom I had resolved to unmask at the first opportunity, had made me feel that I should not accept aught of favor at his hands. Yet other thoughts crowded upon me. Mayhap, after all, he was but pursuing this course with a view to having his revenge upon me in some mean way. He had shown me that he had small opinion of my ability to take creditable part in the contests of sport. No doubt he was fully expecting to see me come off humiliated and defeated, a mark for derision. I grew hot at the thought. Quickly my resolve was taken. I would enter the lists, and I would rob him of his mean revenge. That I could so do, I had some assurance, unless thwarted by untoward events. I had more than once won laurels in manly contests in England, and while I had no feeling of certainty that I would come off as one of the loudly acclaimed victors of the day, still I had the feeling that I would play no mean part, assuredly, not such as he expected me to play. Besides,

and above all else, was the passionate desire to acquit myself as a man in the eyes of her who had hitherto regarded me only with contempt and derision.

I was nursing this desire deep within my heart when there came the three blasts of the cornet which announced the beginning of the contests. I had not yet seen Langdon, but the Master of the Sports had informed me, on presenting the note, that my name was down on the lists for two of the contests, a wrestling bout, and a test of skill with the blades.

I knew just when the first of these would be called, and as I had at least the half of an hour to myself, I wandered restlessly through the crowds, my eyes seeking the one of all others for whose mede of praise my heart thirsted. I found her at last, where I had expected she would be, with the young ladies of fashion and the be-powdered and be-ruffled gallants who, with officers in uniform, were congregated about the Governor.

She was still in white, and again there was the flame of red roses against her breast. I strained my eyes for a glimpse of Langdon in the festive group seated and standing within the Governor's pavilion, but he was not there. A young officer in the uniform of the Grenadiers was bending above My Lady, and the pang that pierced me at sight of the smiles she bestowed upon him was well-nigh beyond endurance.

Seated near by I noted, too, the same pert minx who had twitted me on the adoption of my little Cupid. But there did not seem to be aught of sauciness in her appearance at this moment. Of a truth, she appeared to be holding communion with some pensive thought, for her cheek was against her hand, and her gaze was far away as though for a time she had naught in common with the gay throng about her. Suddenly she glanced

up and saw me standing there, wistfully regarding the gay scene within the Governor's pavilion. For an instant something in my appearance must have startled her, but why I could not surmise. Her chin drooped and the color swiftly dyed her face. Then I saw the lashes sweep her cheeks, as though a shyness possessed her; but even as quickly her mood changed. She flashed me a saucy look and her head bent toward me as though she said, "Good day, sir." 'Twas but a gentleman's act to bow in return, though I had no very high opinion of the forwardness of the chit, yet I could but notice how graceful was the brown head on which the sun at that moment was casting a ray of light.

'Twas but a short time thereafter that I stood within a space, surrounded by spectators, facing my opponent in the wrestling match. He was a young cornet-of-horse, Harcourt by name, a tall comely chap, with a clean-shaven face bronzed by the sun, and muscles taut as a bowstring, as I very quickly discovered. We seemed about equally matched as we began, but I soon became aware that he would surely throw me, when a mishap occurred. As I was pressing him somewhat closely, he took a sudden backward step, no doubt in the hope to loosen the grip I had upon him. His heel came in contact with a root, and, ere he could recover himself, over he went and I on top of him. The momentum was such that we not only sprawled together on the ground, but rolled over and over. Instantly there broke from the spectators a chorus of guffaws. Several voices called to us derisively. One queried as to whether it were a log-rolling or a wrestling bout. We rose flushed and shame-faced, our hair tousled, our clothing awry and covered with sand. Shouts followed us as we retired from the field.

Harcourt took the chaffing good-naturedly, but I was

burning with shame, overwhelmed by mortification. 'Twas no surprising thing that he should take it so easily, for he had naught at stake. 'Twas no more to him from beginning to end than a bit of amusement provided for the onlookers. But to me 'twas altogether a different matter. With those eyes of all others looking on, before which I thirsted to pose as a man, here was torment indeed. I slunk away like any whipped cur, when I should have held my head up and laughed merrily with the others. But I was too sore of heart for such careless front.

I had a full hour to recover myself before came the tilt with the blades. Three pairs of antagonists were to face each other, and this play of the foils would end the contests of the day.

I threw off my coat as the tilt was called. As I did so, I heard a young fellow beside me exclaim:

"Lord, man, I believe they have pitted you against the Captain! 'Tis no child's play you'll have with him. Why, he's the most finished swordsman in the Province."

I glanced up at the words and saw the man he had named awaiting me. My heart gave a bound. I grew hot, then cold. 'Twas my acquaintance of the inn, he who had led the Goose Creek men, Henry Langdon, so-called. So this was his game? "The most finished swordsman in the Province"! And he had arranged it that I should be his antagonist, and for no other reason than that he might humiliate me by easy victory! The blood surged hot within me. For a moment I felt like taunting him with his trickery and leaving him on the spot. But the next instant pride came to my rescue, and I quickly made resolve. I would meet him in the contest and without a quiver. Furthermore, the Almighty being my helper, and my strength and skill not deserting me, this mocking-faced antagonist, who posed as a

gentleman of wealth and position, yet sailed under the black flag, should have no easy victory.

Thus I walked to meet him with head erect, my heart beating regularly, not a lash quivering.

We were to have a few passes at first with our swords, that the scene might partake somewhat of the realistic, I supposed, for the greater edification of the spectators. Then we were to finish with the foils.

As we stood there for the moment facing each other I could hear comments all around us. Evidently everyone expected him to win an easy victory. I caught my name passed about in curiosity and with some degree of amusement at my temerity in facing, even in sport, the champion of the Province.

In appearance we were fairly well matched, though he was somewhat the taller and fuller of figure. He was older, too, by some eight or ten years, I surmised. But age did not hurt him. His vigor was something splendid to look upon.

He gave me a smile as I faced him, then said, "No doubt 'tis a surprise to you to find me here, your opponent in the tilt?"

"Yes," I admitted, giving him a significant glance. Then I added carelessly, "But no matter. As soon you as any other."

The glance he bestowed upon me in return was quick and searching, and there was an odd play of light in his eyes. The next instant he turned and bowed to the spectators, to one in particular, I was sure.

I, too, had now the opportunity to look around me, to note more closely the surging sea of faces. But for the crowd in general I cared naught, but for one fair face in particular everything. 'Twas in vain I strove to still the mad beating of my heart as I sought for it.

The Governor's pavilion, as I saw, was but a few paces from the spot where we stood, and at that side the space was kept clear, so that those within the pavilion could have unobstructed view of all that went on within the arena. Thus I knew, even as I stood there fighting for composure, that My Lady's eyes were upon us. Directly I made bold to lift my eyes and seek her face. I would show her now that I could bear myself as a man. To my deep chagrin, though I gazed straight at her for some seconds, she never once glanced at me. Her eyes were all for the man beside me.

"There is the signal," he said nonchalantly, as he turned to face me. "Are you ready? Then, on guard!"

Our blades rang together. We parried and thrust for some moments. His skill was evident, though I could see he was not doing his best. Evidently he was but testing my own degree of skill. Our sword play must have pleased the onlookers, however, for in the few moments that we used the blades, there was more than one burst of applause. I heard, too, such comment as gave me to understand that my handling of the sword had proved a surprise to the spectators. It was like food to a hungry man.

"Zounds!" commented my opponent in the space that we paused to take breath ere resuming with the foils, "but you have a clearer eye and a more supple wrist than I surmised. But no matter!" he added with assurance, "the play will still end as I will it."

I said nothing. No words of his, I had resolved, should heat my blood. I would keep cool. My old fencing master had impressed upon me the value of holding my temper as firmly as I held my sword. I resolved now to steadfastly follow his advice.

As we paused a second time to recover our wind, I looked about me. I was surprised now to see that a

group of painted and befeathered Indians had pressed in as near to us as the town guardsmen would permit, and were gazing upon us in fascinated, though somewhat stolid curiosity. It did not take me long to discover that their interest was not upon the contest in general, but upon Langdon in particular. It seemed to me I could detect a look almost of reverence upon their faces, despite the hideous paint. No doubt his reputation with the sword was known also to these red men of the forest.

Another matter, too, I now took note of. Upon the lap of my lady, their color a vivid splash against the snowy whiteness of her gown, lay a chaplet of red roses. Then its meaning flashed upon me. They were for the victor in this contest, and My Lady herself would crown him! My heart leapt as the realization came. Then I took firm hold upon myself. I must quell this wild fluttering of the heart if I were to win; and win I would, I now doggedly resolved.

As we again fell to with the foils, I realized almost at the instant that now must I put forth my supreme effort, for such assuredly was Langdon's own intent. Evidently he had the purpose to make quick work of it.

Back and forth we pressed, and I could see he was being surprised by the promptness with which I met his feints and the deftness with which I parried his thrusts. Again and again he sought to strike the weapon from my hand, or to press the button of his foil against my breast. Thus would he win the victory, and he had counted upon it as an easy matter. It was not proving such, however, and I could plainly see his chagrin.

He now began to twit me, hoping, no doubt, to anger me and thus cloud my vision and render my arm unsteady.

"'Pon my soul!" he said, "but you are a gamer bird

than I thought, but not much longer can you keep up this strut, my cockerel!"

I made him no reply, only kept my eye steadily upon him.

"Ha! Ha!" he continued, " 'tis a most surprising young blade! But your arm will soon tire! Of course, we don't want this little play to end too quickly. 'Twould not satisfy the spectators, so we'll keep the curtain up a little longer."

Despite his light tones, I could detect a degree of anxiety. The victory was not going to prove so easy after all, as he had surmised.

He continued to throw me a taunting word between thrusts.

"See you not, my strutting cock, that I am but letting you play with the spoon before taking your medicine? You must soon swallow it, sir, so prepare for the dose."

Still I made no reply. I was keeping as cool as the breeze that blew in from the sea.

Suddenly I saw him grip his nether lip between his teeth. There was the sound of a quick breath sharply indrawn, then a devilish gleam came into his eyes. He made quick thrust toward my shoulder, crying as he did so, "For Carolina and the glory of the Queen!"

But I was prepared for him, for I had read in his sudden thrust a feint, and I struck aside his weapon as he was about to reach my body lower down. Then, as I caught and held his gaze, I cried in return, "For England and the honor of Ashtonholme!"

For an instant I saw him waver. No doubt the unexpectedness of my cry startled him, for, up to that time, I had not opened my mouth. But whatever the cause of that sudden wavering of the arm, 'twas his undoing. The button of my foil caught him full upon the

breast. Had it been my own good sword I held, I could have run him through.

Instantly a tremendous cheer broke forth. I heard my name passed from lip to lip in acclaim. One excited individual broke through the restraint of the guardsmen and began to clap me vigorously upon the back, while he shouted:

"Bless my soul, young fellow! Bless my soul! Who'd 'a' thought it?"

The attendant, after some moments of waiting, brought me my coat, hat, and sword. In the meantime, I heard my name proclaimed as that of the victor. I looked for Langdon, but he had disappeared. I could realize his chagrin. Well, 'twas no more than he deserved, I commented to myself. The biter had been bitten; the fox caught in his own trap.

I threw my head up proudly. My heart was beating tumultuously now, and I had no desire to still it. My joy was about to break bounds. At last, at last I stood before My Lady not only as a man, but as a victor! I let my gaze go boldly toward the pavilion. The Governor's own hand was beckoning to me. I moved toward him with head erect, but with a step that, I now feared me, was far from steady. Truth to tell, the tumult in my heart had set my head to whirling, and had caused a mist to swim before my eyes that well-nigh blinded me.

I heard, as one in a dream, the Governor's command to kneel; then after a space in which I could distinguish voices as though they came from some far-away realm, a light weight fell upon my head, while in my ears sounded a voice as sweet as the ripple of silvery waters, bidding me:

"Arise, my brave sir knight, arise!"

Did my overheated imagination play me false, or did

I really catch the sound of a lingering inflection as she proclaimed me "brave"?

I got to my feet as commanded. I lifted my head, still with its circlet of roses, red as My Lady's own lips, red as my heart's blood then beating every throb for her, and looked—but not into her eyes. Stroke of fate! what a blow. There, standing before me, sweet and maidenly, I had to admit even in that moment of chagrin and bitter disappointment, was the frolicsome minx who had so saucily bestowed upon my little Cupid his name. And thus had My Lady served me!

I blessed my lucky star, then and forever afterwards, that pride came quickly to my rescue; that I was enabled to conceal my mortification and chagrin from all save perhaps one pair of keen eyes. I was thankful, too, that the instincts of a gentleman slumbered not an instant too long; that I was saved the pain of blundering into the wounding of this fair, childlike maid. Mayhap the dignity I now saw in her bearing, the rich color that swept into her cheeks, spurred me in time upon the right course. Of a truth she was fair to look upon, with just the least flash of mischief in her brown eyes and the ripple of the sun's glory upon her hair, as she bent toward me.

I smiled upon her, and removing My Lady's roses from my head, went down at the feet of the maid who had crowned me, and, tendering them, said:

"Fair mistress, I entreat you to accept the trophy of my victory."

Then, as I saw encouragement in the sweet, glowing face, I sprang nimbly up again, and, leaning toward her, laid the chaplet of roses upon the brown head graciously bent to receive it.

CHAPTER VII

I AM AGAIN PURSUED BY ILL FORTUNE

I HAD taken but a few steps away from the pavilion, when I made a discovery that startled me into sharp exclamation. The sword the attendant had brought me, and which now hung by my side, was not my blade, not the splendid weapon prized through three generations of Ashtons, and my father's last gift to me. In the bewilderment following my victory, I had paid little heed when the sword was handed me. Whose, then, was the sword I wore? In an instant the answer flashed into my mind. This was Langdon's blade, and, of course, he had mine. The swords had been exchanged! Who was to blame for this? Was it through the carelessness of the attendant? Likely so, yet —— An uneasy feeling was gaining possession of me. It deepened as I recalled the interest Langdon had displayed in the rare old weapon; his astonishing performance in relieving me of it, unknown to me, on our first meeting, and the glint of covetousness that had been in his eyes as he complimented me upon its possession.

Assuredly Langdon had the sword. Whether it had been by accident or design, it was now in his possession, I was certain. But where was Langdon? My eyes had searched for him in vain in the pavilion. His sudden disappearance increased my suspicion. Had he purposely gone off with my sword?

I made rapid search for him among the crowds now dispersing, but soon despaired. 'Twas like trying to find a pin in a field of straw. But he should not escape me, I resolved; much less should he carry away my

treasured blade. I would search through the entire town, and I would call the guardsmen to aid me. Fortune favored me, however, and I had not to put my threat into execution.

Suddenly I came in sight of him as he was about to turn into a doorway. I arrested his attention by speaking his name, just as his hand was upon the knocker. He looked up, evidently perturbed, and, as he saw me, a scowl settled upon his face.

"Well, what want you of me now? Haven't I had a sufficiency of you for the one day?"

"Hardly," said I, "under the conditions; but if you will kindly return to me my sword, which I observe that you now wear, I will give you the pleasure of seeing no more of me, for a time, at least."

"Your sword?" he echoed, and, to all appearance, he was a man genuinely mystified by the request. But, as I had fixed him in my mind as an actor, ready at any moment to play a part, I had my doubts as to the genuineness of his astonishment.

"Yes," said I, " 'tis my sword you wear; while I, it seems, must have yours. A mistake, think you?" and I looked him boldly in the eye.

He met my gaze steadily; then, as he looked down, apparently for the first time, upon the weapon at his side, he gave a start of amazement.

"Why, to be sure! to be sure!" he exclaimed. " 'Tis your blade, for a fact. How could it have happened, think you? "

"How?" I repeated. "Have you no thought?"

His face cleared.

"Why, yes," he replied. "Of a surety 'twas the attendant who ——"

"Think you really the attendant mixed the blades?" I interrupted, and looked him meaningly in the eye.

He flamed into anger.

"What the devil do you mean, sir?" he demanded.

As he spoke his fingers closed quickly upon the hilt of the sword, as though he were about to draw it upon me.

"I merely asked a question," I replied coolly, "which you have parried with another."

"In heaven's name, sir, how do I know how the swords were mixed? Go ask the attendant, if you are so devilishly solicitous to know."

I bowed to him mockingly.

"It isn't necessary," I replied. "Besides, I know neither his name nor where he is to be found."

"I can believe your ignorance as to both matters," he replied promptly. Then, his anger having apparently simmered down, he asked somewhat abruptly:

"When did you discover that you wore the wrong sword?"

"Within a few minutes after it was given me. And you?"

He returned my gaze unflinchingly.

"At the moment, sir, you called my attention to it; then and not a second before."

He unbuckled the sword as he spoke.

Was this bold lying and a consummate piece of acting, or was it all genuine?

My fingers caressed the weapon as he restored it. Once I had feared I should never look upon it again.

"A fine old weapon!" I exclaimed, in my joy at recovering it. " 'Tis a treasure any man might be proud to possess; but to me it has double value. Not only is it a family heirloom, and one of rare worth, but in my case it means——"

I broke off suddenly as I caught his gaze anticipating my words. I had not intended to say so much, and

instantly regretted my loquacity. But as I noted a certain gleam in his eye, and read it aright, as I believed, a spirit of dare-deviltry led me to conclude as I had intended, for I was burning with resentment at the recollection of the tricky art he possessed, whereby he had surreptitiously relieved me of the blade as we had sat at the table together.

"But in my case it is a means of identification, and the only one now left to me in this strange land. Of a truth, Master Langdon, a pretty pickle indeed I should be in did I not have this blade, with my father's name and the family coat-of-arms engraved thereon, with which to gain the ear of the Governor. Robbed of this, my last means of identification, you can very well see, can you not, the fix I should be in?"

"Why thus unburden yourself to me?" he blazed out. "What interest have I in such matter? Go present your case to His Excellency, for aught that I care, and be hanged to you! But bear this in mind, my assured young bantam, a blade that can easily be passed from one gentleman's scabbard to another's, as you have had evidence, can in no wise furnish proof to be relied upon. Why, that black pirate himself could have relieved you of it, and, presenting himself with it before the Governor, have made fully as good claim as can you."

'Twas like a blow in the face; for, despite my anger, I could see clear enough that it was but the truth he spoke.

"Zounds, man," he continued, "if it is on that blade, and that alone, you are depending to win the Governor's recognition and secure his aid, you might as well, here and now, resign all hope of making successful quest for your brother."

"You know me not, if for one moment 'tis your

thought that I will give up my quest!" I flung at him. "I will strive to carry out my father's desires if a thousand difficulties stand in the way."

"A most dutiful son!" he said as he bowed mockingly. "I congratulate your father." Thereupon he turned, opened the door and passed through, shutting it upon me.

I turned away hot with anger, for now was I sure that I had seen more than that mocking gleam in his eyes. Sure was I, too, that but for him, I should have safe within my possession at this moment my father's letters. By which it can be clearly understood that, despite all I had seen and heard of his position here in the Colony, I was still unshaken in my belief that he was that same strutting, black-hearted villain who had taken the papers from me aboard ship. But what in the fiend's name had possessed him? Of what earthly use could they be to him? And how was I ever to reach the ear of the Governor without those letters? For more and more, as I took my way back to the inn, the conviction strengthened that, rail at this same Master Langdon, as I was now doing, he had but spoken true of matters as they stood. The sword was likely to prove but poor testimony.

Thus it was in a most gloomy plight that I took my course back to the "Three Nags." The Fates had truly dealt me some heavy blows, and that I was still due for further ill fortune very shortly appeared. For no sooner had I reached the inn than I discovered that I had been robbed of every bit of moneyed store I possessed; not a shilling remained. Some pick-purse of the Green had left my pockets as bare as a bald pate.

Rendered weak-kneed by the discovery and startled out of all composure by the realization of what the loss meant to me, I could but exclaim in dismay over my

ill fortune as I sank down upon a bench close beside the main stairway.

"Zounds, man! what ails you?" cried a voice near by. "You look as though you were struck by mortal illness. What is it? Speak out. Need you a leech?"

I looked up to see standing near me, his face very plainly showing his concern, that same young cornet-of-horse, Harcourt, with whom I had recently wrestled on the Green.

" 'Tis no mortal sickness," I told him. "Better if it were, since for aught I can now accomplish I had best be gone out of the world. I've been robbed. Not a shilling have I left," and, scarce knowing what I did at the moment, I turned my pockets out to show him.

"Tut! tut!" he exclaimed; "no worse than that?" and he smiled. " 'Tis a stroke of ill luck quickly remedied. Permit me, a friend——" but there he stopped abruptly, and a queer look overspread his face. "Adzooks! what a mess!" he cried, his hand lifted in dismay. "I had forgotten. Not a farthing have I at present. Lost the last at table only the night agone. But wait, man, I'll go borrow of friends who still have a store of coin left, if such can be found," he added whimsically.

I had heard many noises on the stairway behind me, footsteps, the rustle of women's skirts, voices in greeting or in gay badinage. People were ascending and descending. But naught cared I who heard what had passed between Harcourt and myself, so stricken was I by the misfortune that had befallen. He was but turning away when there came to my ear a soft, rippling laugh, the laugh of one amused, of one making quite merry over some matter. My cheeks flushed hotly. Was that laugh at my expense? Did some heartless one of the female sex find cause for amusement in my sorry plight?

I turned quickly and glanced upward. A little group of persons had paused upon the stairs; and I went hotter than ever to note in the midst of them My Lady, attended by that arch-villain, Langdon, and on the other side of her the madcap, brown-haired maid, who had but lately crowned me victor on the Green. They had heard, I was sure, for even as I looked up, Langdon's eyes met mine, and he smiled maliciously.

My Lady, too, was looking down at me, but I could see no amusement on her face. Rather her expression was one of wistfulness; and now I saw, for the first time, how sweet and womanly it could be. But was her look really upon me? Was it not after all for Langdon that softened light that had come into her eyes? Certainly that laugh of amusement had not issued from her lips. Then quickly I knew who had thus found cause for merriment at my expense. 'Twas that same prankish minx who now stood beside My Lady with so demure an air, and eyes cast down innocently. I continued to gaze at her till I compelled her eyes to meet mine, and on that same instant her cheeks went red and her head was turned aside in guilty confusion. Then, as though this were not enough, My Lady spoke reprovingly, "For shame, Alec, to find cause for mirth in another's misfortune."

"But, Rose," came quickly the minx's response, "'twas not at misfortune I laughed; but at the look on Master Harcourt's face when he dug with so assured an air for coin, and found naught but empty pockets. 'Twas, methinks, enough to make a cat laugh."

"And a most mischievous kitten thou art truly," My Lady replied.

But now they had moved up the stairs and I was left again to the contemplation of the pretty pickle in which a rogue's light fingers had placed me. I had little hope

of aid from Harcourt. 'Twas a mad, gay time, when no doubt the gaming spirit ran high and gentlemen were likely to be lured to the card table by tricksters who quickly relieved them of the contents of their purses. Harcourt would in all probability find his friends in the same fix as himself. Besides, 'twas a most embarrassing matter to receive moneyed help from a stranger, especially when I had no prospect at present of being able to return the loan.

I was on the point of getting up to seek my room, there to form some plan to relieve me of my desperate strait, when suddenly, as though it had dropped through the roof from the sky, an object sped past my head, almost striking me on the ear, and fell with a thud and a clink straight into my lap. Amazed, I looked up. There was the scurrying of skirts away from the railing of the landing above me, then a little tremulous burst of laughter; and no more than this did I see or hear, since by now the stairway was deserted.

Curious, as well as astonished, I now gave my attention to the object which had fallen with such sure aim into my lap. 'Twas a dainty bit of lace that did exhale a delicate and a most delightful perfume, and that was knotted about something very hard that gave forth a clink as I handled it. I soon discovered 'twas a lady's handkerchief, and as I loosed its knotted ends with fingers that trembled with excitement, there came to view shining coin, golden guineas, five of them. Soon, too, I saw in one corner of the handkerchief a daintily embroidered rose with leaves and buds all complete. Now, indeed, did my heart pound madly, for clearly I saw that she who had thus come to my aid in my time of necessity was none other than My Lady. Had not the minx called her Rose? And was there not here, in the corner of this dainty, perfumed bit of lace the em-

broidered emblem of that sweetest of names? Truly now had I evidence that she had relented toward me. No longer was her heart hardened against me, no longer was I held by her in contempt because of those turns of ill fortune by which I had been made to appear in so poor a shape before her. Her heart, after all, was tender, womanly. Had I not proof of it here in my hand? My sorry plight had touched her and won her sweet aid. Forgotten now were all the words that had carried so sharp a sting, the contempt that had flashed upon me from the lovely eyes; forgotten, too, the slight she had put upon me on the Green, when my heart had flared hot with anger against her.

I pressed to my lips the dainty bit of lace that her fingers had so lately touched, not caring who saw me, then tucked it away in the breast of my coat, where already I felt it warm against my heart. Strange that I did not now think of the embarrassment of receiving moneyed aid from a stranger, as had been the case with Harcourt. But I was in too entranced a state at the moment for thought of aught else save that My Lady's heart had been awakened in tenderness toward me.

Springing up, I began to ascend the stairway to my room, and so light of heart had I become that, as I went, to my surprise I began gaily to whistle "When the King Comes into His Own Again."

Then there at the turn of the stairway I came face to face with that madcap maid who did so recently find sport at my expense. "Alec," My Lady had named her, and of a truth it fitted her well, for of a boyish spirit was the minx. I was of the mind to pass her by with not so much as a look, for she had sore wounded me by her gayety over my distress. In no degree had she convinced me that her mirth had been for Harcourt. Yet as I sought to pass her with gaze averted, swiftly there

came remembrance of the scene at the Governor's pavilion, of the sweet and womanly expression that had been on her face, the low music of her voice, the shy droop of the dark lashes, as the maidenly color dyed her cheeks. Truly here was a maid of mystifying moods.

I lifted my hat as I now looked up to meet a sparkling glance from her brown eyes.

"You are making most merry, sir," she said. "Certes! Fortune's frown has speedily changed to a smile."

"Verily, Mistress, such has been the case," I assured her. "Sweet messages of hope have come to me. All the world is bright again, since Love beckons."

She cast me an odd glance.

"Forget not, sir, that Fortune is a fickle Mistress, and that Love hath many stings."

Courtesying demurely, she gave me another glance from her mischievous brown eyes as she turned away.

CHAPTER VIII

I AM GRANTED AUDIENCE WITH THE GOVERNOR

I NOW realized that the sooner I sought interview with the Governor the better it would be. On the morrow perchance he would leave the city, though I had heard that it probably would not be till the day following. Yet, as I had been also informed, the affairs at his plantation, Silk Hope, were such he was likely to feel urgency to return ere he had stayed out the time allotted to the festivities. He was housed at the inn, as his town residence was then undergoing repairs.

Thus early the next morning I made bold to send him a line or two, asking to be granted the indulgence of some words with him, at whatever hour of the day best suited his convenience. I knew the Governor to be a busy man, a man much harassed by the fast increasing disorders in the Province. In addition, he was a man of many interests. There was the great plantation, Silk Hope, that called for his constant attention; the extensive salt works on Sewee Bay; lumber mills; and the rice industry carried on upon a large scale.

For a great man, with a multitude of affairs pressing heavily upon him, and all manner of persons making demand upon his time, the Governor's reply to me was both prompt and courteous. But he could not give me audience before the morrow, he informed me. At ten of the clock on the following morning, I could call upon him in his apartments at the inn. He would then give me some moments in which to state my business with him; but these moments, of necessity, must be few in number.

I conned over and over what I should say to him; but as the time drew nearer and nearer, I found myself losing more and more of the assurance that had been mine when I applied for an audience.

Had I any well-grounded hope for thinking that he would accept my story as true? Would my father's sword really bear witness for me as I so ardently desired? Might it not, after all, be an easier matter for the Governor to hold suspicion of my right to its possession? There was so much of villainy abroad. Cheats, assassins were numerous. Men were slain, even in public places, for their valuables. There were pirates on land as well as on the high seas. These things and more I had learned since landing in the Province.

I was pondering over these perplexing matters as I sought my room after having partaken of supper. I approached the wide stairway that gave access to the gallery upon which opened the more richly furnished sleeping apartments of the inn and also the great drawing-room. So absorbed was I that I had begun the ascent ere I became aware of a festively attired group of fair ones and gallants descending. Four maids there were and as many attending swains, with a haughty-looking grand dame in the rôle of duenna.

They were almost upon me ere I discovered them. It was too late to retreat, but, of a truth, I had no such desire. Why should I scurry away like a frightened hare at the approach of these fair creatures? All the more determined was I to advance boldly, to hold my head erect, since in their midst, as I quickly discovered, was the fairest of all the fair, my one Rose of the World. My heart almost stopped its beating at sight of her loveliness. In white she was again, from slim white throat to dainty slipper. Of white satin the dress was, soft and silvery like moonbeams upon snow. Pearls gleamed

against the shining hair, and other strands of them were about the white column of the slender throat.

I allowed myself but the one quick glance, but it was of a sufficiency to send my heart into a wild tumult. So dizzy did I become with the pounding in my ears, my foot all but missed the next step, and I came within a hair's breadth of playing again in her presence the rôle of a lumbering ass.

As I was about to pass on, after having paused for a brief space in which to lift my hat and bow in honor of the group of fair ones in general, a voice with a lilt in it stayed me.

"And how is Don Cupid, sir?" it queried.

I turned to see regarding me that same mischievous sprite who had named him, the maiden upon whose brown head I had placed the circlet of roses, after my victory on the Green.

'Twas a merry challenging look I caught from the brown eyes now, and I answered in the same tone of light banter:

"Well, fair mistress, the little rascal is quite well, I assure you, with a growing appetite that is filling me with terror, for if it continues, he will soon empty my pockets."

She gave me an arch glance as she moved away. The maid was quite young and her manner had the frankness of a lad's, but the kindliness with which she had accosted me, though spiced with humor, was all woman, and the remembrance of it as I went on my way to the loneliness of my room was like a gentle touch upon my heart.

They were bound for the concert and the ball that was to follow, I knew. A pang of longing smote me as I thought of the festive scenes amid which they would mingle. But such were not for me, at least not for the present.

The next morning, after a careful toilet, for I had now received the remainder of my effects from the *Abigail and Anne,* and with my father's sword proudly buckled on, I took my way to the Governor's apartments. It was on the stroke of the hour as I reached the door, and the attendant opened it at once, announcing my name.

Removing my hat, I entered and made my way across the room toward an open window, near which, beside a table, the Governor was sitting. Evidently he had not heard the attendant announce me, for he was not looking up. To my further consternation, I noted that a lady was sitting beside him, who seemed to be writing at his dictation.

I purposely made noise upon the floor with my foot. Both looked up then, and my heart came near to betraying me into exclamation, for the lady beside the Governor was she of all the world who had the power to throw me into such state of confusion.

The Governor eyed me for an instant, then, seeming to remember, motioned me to approach. At the same time he spoke to the lady:

"Rose—Mistress Aylmar, you are excused, my dear. We will complete this little matter at another time. In my absorption I neglected to note that the hour had arrived in the which I had promised to give audience to this young gentleman."

"Rose! Rose Aylmar!" At last I knew her full name. "Rose" she was to the Governor, and "Mistress Rose" to others, but to me Rose of all the World! and ever would be. She paid no more attention to me, however, than to the carpet beneath her feet, as she gathered up her papers and prepared to depart.

As she stood up, tall and slim, beside me, my heart leapt at sight of the proudly poised head, the lissome

figure, the beauty and grace of the white throat, the creamy skin as fine as silk. O pearl of all things, lovely woman! thought I; adored by even the Great Artist who created thee! And here was the loveliest of all her sex.

The Governor sought to rise; to attend her to the door, as I surmised. But he was an old man, past seventy, and his movements were slow. A spirit of daring seized me. I would anticipate him and escort My Lady myself.

She seemed not to notice that it was I and not the Governor who attended her. Of a truth, she paid me no more attention than if I had been miles away.

As we neared the door, I stepped beside her, and, as I was about to open it, bowed as I said:

"Permit me, Mistress."

But she was too quick for me. Ere I could lay hand upon the knob to turn it, her own had sought and found it. Then, as she stood for a moment, ere passing through, with head upflung to give me stare, I could have sworn there was a glint of amusement in her eye.

I heard the Governor laugh as the door closed.

"The Rose has thorns," he said, as I returned to his side, "and many luckless swains get pierced, but to the master hand 'tis a Rose all velvet."

I did not understand him then; but I was to have the torment of the knowledge later.

"And now," he said, as he motioned me to a seat, "let me know quickly the nature of the business that has thus brought you to me." There was that in his manner that gave me to understand that I would lose ground at once did I begin by burdening his ear with explanations. So, I resolved to plunge at once into the matter by telling him who I was.

"Your Excellency, I crave your interest in me and

my affairs, because of the friendship you bear my father, Edward Ashton, of Ashtonholme in Sussex."

"What!" exclaimed he as his head went up and he gave me a quick searching glance; "do I really understand you to claim that you are the son of that Edward Ashton with whom I campaigned many a day in the Stuart cause? That Edward Ashton, who of a truth was more like a younger brother than a companion in arms."

"You have heard aright, Your Excellency, I am indeed the son of that Edward Ashton. I am the younger son, Mark Ashton."

He made movement as though he would extend his hand. Then, apparently thinking better of it, and no doubt of the mind to withhold this acknowledgment until I had strengthened my claim, his hand dropped as he turned to query somewhat sharply:

"Bring you proofs of this you have stated?"

His piercing glance sent a chill of apprehension through me.

"Alas, sir," I faltered, "I set out from home with such proofs; letters written to you in my father's hand; and other letters writ by you to him since your parting in London on the downfall of the Stuart cause."

At these words the severity of his face changed to a kindlier expression as he queried:

"And these letters; you have them safely?"

"Alas, no, Your Excellency, since they have been taken from me."

"How so?" There was a sharp note in his voice.

"On the high seas, within two days of Charles Town, a pirate and his fiendish crew did board our ship, the *Abigail and Anne,* fleecing the passengers—myself among the number—of all their valuables; sparing our lives, it is true, but flaunting it into our faces that this was done only because of their worthlessness. It was

this same pirate Captain who did rob me of the letters along with other valuables."

"He took letters of no value to him," commented the Governor. "A strange proceeding, I must admit."

I could see incredulity, even doubt in his expression, and I made desperate effort to convince him of the truth of that which I had stated. He must, he should believe me. There was too much at stake.

"In God's name, sir," I cried, "I entreat you to believe me. 'Tis the truth and naught else but the truth I have spoken. I beg you to listen to me. Hear me in full." Then, ere waiting to gain word of permission, I poured out the whole story to him. I told him of my brother's strange silence, of my father's sore grief, the quest upon which I had been sent; and last of all I pictured to him as best I could the misfortune that had overtaken me in the loss of the papers and of nearly all the store of gold with which my father had supplied me. Then I placed the sword in his hands.

"Here, sir," I said, "is the one remaining proof of the truth of what I have stated to you. My father's sword, and his father's before him. It has the Ashton name and the Ashton coat-of-arms engraved upon it. Surely 'tis not the first time your eyes have rested upon it, and 'twill be no hard matter for you to identify it."

I could see his hand tremble slightly as he fingered the sword, and the hard stern lines about his mouth had softened.

" 'Tis of a surety the sword of Edward Ashton," he said, as he handed it back to me. "But, my young sir, this is a day of chicanery. Rogues, adventurers, mountebanks, men who claim to be whom they are not, come constantly into this Province. Dark deeds are committed that honest names may be stolen and worn, and proud titles assumed. For aught I know to the con-

trary, this sword may not have come honestly into your hands. But I am making no such accusation against you," he added quickly, as he noted the hot waves of shame that flooded my face.

"Of a truth," he continued, and now I could not mistake the kindness in his voice, "I am inclined to believe you. You have told me a very straightforward story. Besides, you have not the appearance of one given to trickery, to false dealing. The desire lies close against my heart that you prove to be he whom you claim that you are, son of the Edward Ashton dear to me as a brother."

I bowed gratefully as he uttered these words.

"I thank you, sir," I said as steadily as I could, for, truth to tell, his intimation that I might be rogue and mountebank had well-nigh crushed me.

"I desire to ask further question," he said gravely, "then I shall the better know what course to pursue."

Through the next few moments he subjected me to the fire of many questions. As he concluded, I could see that the readiness and the satisfaction with which I had replied to him had most favorably impressed him. Having taken the precaution to read his letters to my father, with which my father had entrusted me, I was all the more enabled to answer him satisfactorily.

"And now," said he, "it behooves me to give you succor in this your day of need. You will consider yourself under my care until such time as communication can be sent to and received from your father. As to the search for your brother, I will give you all the aid there is in my power to bestow. I am moved, however, to say to you frankly that I have little hope of the success of your quest. In my opinion your brother is dead, for what son with the least grain of regard for home and parent would have so conducted himself? But

that your father's wishes may be faithfully carried out, I will begin at once such plans for a search of the Province as it is possible to conduct in the present disturbed conditions. It may be," he said after a pause, "that your brother, animated by a spirit of adventure, and lured by the stories of the fabulous wealth to be found in the Indian strongholds of the interior, was led thither, and either perished or is held captive."

"Then, Your Excellency," I replied promptly, "if such be your supposition, it is my duty to at once begin search for him there."

He raised his hand as though I were preparing at that moment to start on the quest and he would stay me.

"Nay," he said, "such step is out of the question at this time. The Indians of the interior, especially the Yemassees, incited by our Spanish foes, have become so turbulent that we are expecting almost any day to have them fall upon the settlements. I can permit no expedition into their territory, unless it be one of armed troops, until matters grow quieter. But rest assured," he concluded, "I shall do everything possible to be done in the city here and in such portions of the Province as are accessible."

"Then, Your Excellency," I asked him despairingly, "what is there for me to do?"

He pondered for a moment ere replying.

"You will go home with me on the morrow, to Silk Hope, my plantation, and there you will remain until such time as you can take the active part you desire in the quest for your brother. In the meanwhile, at Silk Hope, you can under my direction, by post and other means, make such enquiries as may lead you into some knowledge at least of your brother."

"But, Your Excellency," I queried, overcome by his kindliness, "what return shall I have it in my power to

make you for this kindness? 'Tis sorely against my better feelings to be such tax upon you. As you are aware, I am a man at present all but beggared by the hard turn of Fortune."

"I presume," he replied, eyeing me speculatively, "that your father's son would be a man of education, well grounded in a knowledge of books, and versed in the use of the quill?"

I gave him an affirmative reply. "I write a fair clerkly hand," I assured him. " 'Tis one of the few accomplishments I possess."

"Then nothing could be better," he declared, and I saw his face brighten. "In that case, you have it in your power to aid me, and to aid me greatly. In addition to the affairs of the Province, which do sorely burden me, there are matters of my own that press for attention, for more than 'tis possible for me to give. For some time I have had the mind to engage a secretary solely for these affairs, but until to-day I have not been enabled to come upon one that seemed, to my way of thinking, fitted for the post. I now offer it to you at a stipend of sixty pounds the quarter. Will you accept it?"

Would I accept it? I could scarcely credit my own ears. Would I—almost beggared, with but three gold pieces remaining with which to ward off the gaunt wolf of want, with thousands of miles between me and my home—would I accept a post that brought me not only the food I would need, and the shelter of a home, but also some degree of credit and a wage in gold?

I not only accepted but also warmly expressed my gratitude.

From what I had learned I was aware that the Governor's affairs in connection with Silk Hope alone were of considerable magnitude. This silk industry was becoming more and more profitable throughout the Pro-

ince. The first to engage in it had been the Huguenots, several colonies of whom had come to the Province on the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. Some families were clearing as much as seventy-five to one hundred pounds a year by the care bestowed upon the silkworm; but the Governor, as I had been told, was far ahead of them all in the profit secured. His income from the exportation of the raw silk had for the past three years more than doubled the recompense received as Governor of the Province. And he was not only engaged in the production of the silk fibre, but his looms were also weaving the cloth.

"One warning I desire to give you," said the Governor, as we were parting for the time. "Enter not into controversy with these brawling wranglers over politics and religion. The whole Province at present is in a condition of turmoil. The cradle of state is being rocked to its foundation. Be not drawn into the turbulence."

I thanked him for his advice, and promised to so take heed. But forsooth! what need was there to caution me? What part would I care to take in the disputes of these babbling Dissenters, with their bastard creeds and beliefs? Like my father I held robust faith in the King's religion, whatever it might be; and no amount of argument or persuasion could dislodge me therefrom.

I could see that the Governor himself was worn and weary with the bickerings and wranglings. Very plain it was that he was not reposing upon any bed of roses. His brow was furrowed with many hard, stern lines, while anxiety lurked in his eyes despite their keen glances. 'Twas said that he was disposed to assume a kindlier attitude toward the Dissenters, but that he was pushed hard by my Lord Granville, his superior in command. Being a soldier, the Staunch Old Knight—as he was known, held obedience to be first of all.

On leaving the Governor I had yet some hours of daylight in which to view further the odd scenes taking place in this new strange land to which I had so recently come.

Even at this early date Charles Town, as I had been informed, was second to none other city in the New World both as to business prosperity and social life. Many of the planters were also merchants, and a trade was carried on that extended far into the interior. This trade was principally with the Indians and in furs. Other lines of commerce consisted of dealings in tar, pitch, turpentine, barrel staves and the products of the fields of the plantations.

The wharves were a succession of bustling scenes, with ships coming and going and cargoes being loaded and unloaded. Even as I now gazed out across the fine broad harbor, I saw riding at anchor, no less than a score of vessels, many of them from far-away lands.

One portion of the city's activities for which I had no stomach was that of the slave marts. The sight of men and women put upon the block and sold like cattle sickened me. No matter if they were half-wild black creatures, chattering like monkeys, they were human beings. I had held the thought that the Dutch were responsible for the bringing of the first African slaves to the Carolina Colony, but now I learned better. The man responsible for the beginning of this iniquitous business was no less than one Sir John Yeamans, afterwards Governor of the Colony, and an Englishman. My heart did feel mightily of shame to so learn. But there was greater cause still why my heart should hold shame for the deeds of my countrymen. In Carolina there were at this time, by actual count, one hundred and twenty white slaves, equally divided between men and women. Much of this atrocious state of affairs was due to Crom-

well's damnable course in Ireland and elsewhere, herding men and women like sheep aboard ships, mixing the well-born with the scum of London and other towns, and sending all to the Colonies to be put upon the block and sold as slaves.

But there were many pleasant things about the town to see, the well-laid-out streets paved with shells; the shops lining the main thoroughfares, a number of them gay with the display of European goods; the fine homes built of brick brought from the Mother Land, with gardens redolent with sweets, and with tall shrubbery of the most beautiful verdure. There were a number of the homes facing the bay, each with a private wharf of its own. Around the sea-wall was a promenade, where the gallants in their finest array sauntered at evening with the fair ones of their choice, paying devoted court to their lady-loves till the watch-house bell clanged out its nine warning strokes; when each must hie to his home. Otherwise, the constables came along and arrested all loiterers. If no coin were at hand to pay the fine, straight to the guard-house the luckless one was taken.

I was interested in noting the strong manner in which the town had been fortified through the sagacity of the Governor. There were no less than six forts with cannon in each ready for action. Still, as I soon came to see, with all this precaution as to defense the position of the Carolina Colony was one of grave peril. There was none other at that time in the New World so remote, so isolated from its sister Colonies. The nearest of these was that on the James, three hundred miles away. In a time of danger, therefore, what could the Carolinians hope for in the way of help from men of their own nation? This thought was to come to me later with a deeper significance.

CHAPTER IX

I JOURNEY UP A BOLD STREAM KNOWN AS COOPER RIVER

'Twas close to a full day's journey by rowboat to Silk Hope, the Governor's main plantation, near the head of Cooper River, and in the midst of the Goose Creek Settlement. The creek, I had been informed, had been so called because of its resemblance to the winding neck of a goose.

The river was the chief means of communication between the plantations and the town. Most of the traveling was therefore done by boat. In consequence, of so much value to him was a man's boat, there had been rigid laws made imposing heavy penalties both for injury to or the theft of a boat. For stealing, injuring, or deliberately sending the boat of another person adrift, a fine to the extent of the value was exacted if the offender were a freeman. But if he were a slave, white or black, or an Indian, forty lashes upon the bare back was the punishment meted out for the first offense. For a second like offending, the thief's ears were cut off.

These laws, as I had been informed, were the outcome of an enactment passed in the days of "the mild old Quaker Governor," Archdale, as he was styled, which information did greatly astonish me, since they were most stringent laws, to my way of thinking.

Sir Nathaniel had informed me that his boat, on the morrow, would leave Master Rhett's wharf at eight of the clock precisely. Therefore he advised promptness on my part. My effects would be provided for in the regular plantation boat, bearing supplies and leaving at the same hour.

Thus, desiring not to be the cause of any delay in the Governor's plans for departure, I left the inn a full half hour prior to the time set. Close following at my heels was my little Cupid, near to bursting with joy that he had been permitted to come along.

Just how the Governor, especially the fair ones of his party, would receive this lively addition to my effects, I knew not. Truth to tell, I had more or less of uneasiness in regard to the matter. But to one thing I had fully made up my mind, I could not, I would not abandon the little waif, whose soft eyes looked with such trustfulness into mine and whose tail was nigh to wag itself off at every kind word I gave him.

The Silk Hope boat was there, drawn up beside the wharf, and rocking gently with the tide, its eight lusty black oarsmen patiently awaiting upon the Governor's pleasure; but as yet no member of the Governor's party had appeared.

Other boats were in the vicinity, awaiting passengers, while others again were already pushing out, having received their cargo of freight or passengers. Of them all that of the Governor was easily conspicuous. 'Twas full eighteen feet in length, and some five to six in width. Rising from the center was a canopy of stout sail-cloth in gay stripes, while above it floated the Governor's colors. Beneath the canopy a carpet was outspread and on this were low seats, and cushions heaped together. On coming down the river, as I surmised, the black rowers had gathered and made garlands of that same odorous yellow flower I have before mentioned. These they had twined about various portions of the boat, giving it quite a festive appearance.

While I idled about, taking in the odd scenes being enacted, a heavy hand suddenly fell upon my shoulder and a loud voice hailed me.

"By the living Jingo! if it isn't that same Mark Ashton, whose acquaintance I made aboard the *Abigail and Anne*. Well, my lively young cockerel, how's the world gone with you since we parted? Had a roaring time with the ladies, eh, spite o' the fleecing of that damned pirate?"

'Twas, of course, Major Popple who thus greeted me.

I replied by assuring him that I had had as fair a time as could be expected by one in a strange land with a well-nigh empty pocket. As to the ladies, I added, they had not thought it worth their while to bestow even the smallest attention upon me.

The Major gave me a resounding slap between the shoulders, and chortled as he exclaimed, "As if you can make me believe that, you with those love-lorn eyes and that mop of curls! Fudge, man! your modesty is too thinly veneered. It doesn't pass muster. But whither bound," he broke off; "and what the devil have you got there?" pointing to Cupid, now cuddled in my arms and licking my cheek ecstatically in return for the fondling.

I answered his last question first.

" 'Tis a little dog that was bestowed upon me in a most strange fashion," and I related to him the story.

He threw up his head to fair roar with laughter.

"And 'tis your intention to keep the little beast?"

I replied in the affirmative.

"Lord, man! and can you find no woman's head to fondle on your breast that you have to go mooning over that miserable little cur?"

I cast him indignant glance. I had no fancy for his coarse chaffing.

" 'Tis no mooning I am doing," I told him. "The dog was thrust upon me. Apparently his last friend was gone, if he had ever had any. His misery, his helplessness appealed to me. I shall keep him."

"Yea, till some woman comes along," he scoffed; "the woman with the right to pillow her head where now that ill-favored little beast reposes. Then down she'll fling him by the nape of his neck."

"No woman," I replied warmly, "who can find it in her heart to ill-treat an innocent and helpless little creature like this one, can ever be loved by me."

"Fiddlesticks! Fol-de-rol! Mere rubbish every bit of it! You'll change your tune, and like that"—he snapped his fingers—"when the right woman arrives."

He had come nearer, and was now gazing intently at the little dog cuddled in my arms.

"As I supposed!" he exclaimed. " 'Tis the pirate's dog, and none other."

"What mean you by that?" I made haste to query.

"What I have said, and no less. I have seen the little beast about town too many times to mistake. I saw him, too, with his pirate master in prison, that very same limb of the devil who fleeced us aboard the *Abigail and Anne.*"

"What?" I ejaculated, and in my astonishment came near to dropping Cupid.

" 'Tis as I say. They had that devil's spawn fast enough at one time and some of his crew—'twas Rhett who captured them; no matter if it were by a bit of trickery. Honest dealing is not for such dastards as they be. But Black Locks, as he is known, was too smart for them. He made his escape, leaving the men of his crew and the little dog behind. The men were hung, and the little beast became the target of ill-use in the town. But," he broke off, "you have not yet answered my question. Whither bound?"

Knowing his sentiments toward Sir Nathaniel, I hesitated ere replying; for I had no desire there in so public

a place to call forth the tirade I was sure mention of the Governor's name would bring. But I must not play coward, so I replied boldly:

"Having been shorn bare by the pirate; and finding it necessary, for a time at least, to find employment whereby I am kept from want, I have gladly accepted the position offered me by Sir Nathaniel, that of clerk in his private affairs."

"By the Lord Harry!" he exclaimed, bringing his hands sharply together. "You surely are not going to run your head into that noose?"

"I do not so consider it," I informed him with a plain show of indignation. Truth to tell, his dabbling in my affairs was not at all to my liking.

"Hearken to me, lad," he exclaimed suddenly, and I could but note the concern in his voice, "take my advice and stay away from the Goose Creek Settlement. Why, man! 'tis a very pot-house of brawling at present. What with the Governor himself, stiff-necked as the golden calf of Aaron and arrogant as the very Lord Devil, leading the Churchmen on the one side; and the Dissenters fiery hot on the other, egged on—most comical to behold—by that sulphur-belching Church of England parson, Marstone—'tis a very hell let loose. Keep away, lad, keep away!"

" 'Tis no worse there than here in town, I take it," I proclaimed confidently.

"I tell you it is! 'Tis true," he added thoughtfully, "the whole Province is in a state of ferment; turbulence is abroad in the land; but at Goose Creek, the home of the Governor and of the Penny Barons, there, sir, is the very heart of the storm. In fact, there rages the fire that has set the whole pot of devil's broth to boiling. A damnable mess, truly it is, that the Governor and his Penny Barons have brewed!"

"The Penny Barons?" My look carried as much of enquiry as did the words.

"The Penny Barons, sir, are the made-to-order nobility—Lord save the word!—of this Province; the patented aristocracy of Carolina; with titles paid for in coin of the realm. Yea, with titles set to rise over night like dough and turned out in the morning freshly baked to hand. Gad! sir, those men think they own this whole country. What with the land they have stolen from the Indians, other land paid for at a penny the acre, and additional tracts bestowed by the King, who had no more right to it than you and I, sir—they have set themselves up as landed gentry, and are proposing to run this Province after a high-handed fashion of their own; after the manner of the hog, sir, to gorge themselves with everything in sight.

" 'Tis the Penny Barons," he continued, fairly sputtering in his ire, "who most of all next to Granville himself, are egging the Governor on to the tyrannical course he is pursuing. But right willing he is to be so urged, since he is of the same stamp, a tyrant first and last, nigh eaten up by thought of his own importance."

"I fear you misjudge the Governor, Major," I ventured.

"Misjudge him? By the Eternal! let his own deeds speak for him. What for instance could be more damnable, I ask you, than his course with reference to the passage of the Church Acts?"

"I know little as to that," I reminded him.

"Then damme, sir, you shall be speedily enlightened. What did he do, the tyrant who has set out to rule or ruin this fair Province? Had an Act passed by the Assembly, whereby every man not a communicant of the Church of England had the last vestige of civil liberty stripped from him; had the Act passed at a time when

the majority of the men of the Lower House—the very men affected by it—were away on their plantations tending their rice crops.

"I tell you again that you are going into a nest of hotheads, of blinded religious bigots, who prate of liberty, of the rights of freemen; then turn and roar like wild beasts if a man claims the right to worship God as his conscience dictates. It is an affront, an insult, an invasion of the rights of freemen. Damnable tyranny, and no less! A survival of the Dark Ages!"

He was near to bursting with wrath as he kept on.

"I warn you, sir, that these intolerant bigots are due to receive what they deserve before many more suns rise and set over Carolina. Men of spirit will not long submit to such tyranny. Every Non-Conformist in the Province is up in arms, be he Presbyterian, Baptist, Independent; even the Quakers, though they say, 'We fight not.'"

How much longer he would have gone on in this strain I know not; but at that moment a voice from the water loudly hailed him.

"There! my boat's ready, I see," he said as he prepared to depart. "Well, good-day, lad; and may luck attend you in spite of this rash decision you have made to take up your abode at Goose Creek. Of two things further I warn you. Take you heed of loaded guns and women's tongues; for in both there is peril," and with this he was gone.

To my relief I now saw the Governor and his party approaching. 'Twas well past the hour set for departure, as I knew; for the watch-house bell had sometime since clanged out the eight strokes.

From certain bantering words, that drifted to me as the party drew near, 'twas evident that the young ladies had been the cause of the delay. They were being

twitted with lingering too long before their mirrors. I could well believe it, for they were truly a dazzling sight as they approached, arrayed in the attire Dame Fashion at that time decreed, and each wearing a large hat very much beplumed. Each carried, too, one of the new sunshades which had recently come from Barbadoes. The shades were fashioned on mahogany frames tipped with ivory, and each had a long ferrule of shining brass.

The Governor walked in the midst of the ladies, assisting first one and then another. His gallantry was marked. He might be, as I had heard claimed, a tyrant, the arrogant and stubborn ruler of men, but with women he was all courtier.

There were six of the fair sex to whom he thus gallantly devoted attention. First of all was the Governor's lady herself, and close beside her, walking with the same grand-dame air, their daughter, Madam Broughton. Hovering near the Governor, and clutching his arm at every opportunity, was a little old lady, much bewrinkled of countenance, but with bright and restless eyes that missed naught of anything. She walked with a mincing step as though she were treading the minuet, and her tongue kept up a constant clacking like the hopper of a mill.

Behind this aged dame, and mischievously imitating her mincing step, was that brown-haired minx, Alec—I had yet to learn her other name. I was shocked by her lack of reverence for one advanced in years. Yet I could not help but notice how very dainty and charming the maid looked in a gown of pale green dimity sprigged with pink roses.

In front of the party came Mistress Rose Aylmar, and keeping pace with another of the fair sex, young and of a most pleasing appearance. As I was afterwards to

learn, this was Mistress Anne Coming, close friend of Mistress Rose, whose father, Sir John Coming, was one of the important men of the Goose Creek section.

Perhaps I would not have sent Mistress Anne so pleasing a glance had I known at the time that she had been one of the party, and among those the more highly amused, when I had sprawled so ignominiously upon my lady's petticoats.

The Governor handed each of the ladies into the boat. Then, in the meantime I having approached, he presented me to them formally as Master Ashton, his newly-engaged secretary.

As I blushed and bowed, I caught the sounds of low-spoken comments and above all that of a feminine giggle. Whence it came I was not sure; but I felt my cheeks grow hotter still at the sound. Plainly I was an object of merriment to these fair maidens.

Just then the Governor, having caught sight of Cupid, was questioning gravely:

"You wish to take the little beast along?"

"If there is no objection, I do so desire, Your Excellency. 'Tis a poor little waif who has attached himself to me. He has no other friend, hence I feel that I cannot abandon him."

"The dirty little beast will have fleas!" I heard a voice exclaim indignantly, and there was further sound of giggling.

Evidently Cupid and his master were serving as the target not only of feminine displeasure but also of amusement.

"Well, in with you," said the Governor, at length consenting, "but keep the little beast away from the ladies."

"That I will, sir," I replied. "I will keep him at my feet. He shall disturb no one."

"Bless my soul!" clacked the tongue of the little old dame, Madam Ball, "what a very tender-hearted young man. He cannot bear to leave his little dog behind. Remarkable, most remarkable! What a very tender and considerate husband he would make!"

I heard a quick rippling laugh, silvery as the bubbling of a spring; then a voice that I was sure came from none other than that pert minx, who had before let fly more than one shaft of sauciness at me.

"To think, dears! He will have Cupid at his feet instead of against his heart."

Our boat had been backed out into the stream, and was now moving up river skillfully propelled by the deft strokes of the lusty black oarsmen, who, as the blades rose and fell in unison, sang with such engaging melody as never before had I heard:

"Ole Satan fling de ball at me,
He fling de ball to hit me;
But de ball he miss an' gone to hell,
An' my soul am goin' to hebben.
Good news! Good news!
My soul am goin' to hebben!"

'Twas a sweet, clean morning, fresh as a maiden's smile, with a spanking breeze blowing in from the sea.

As we moved up-stream we had a fine clear view of the town we were leaving, ashine now in the effulgent beams of the well-risen sun, that was kindling into a warmer glow the red-tiled roofs and pouring a flood of gold over the tall spire of the English Church.

" 'Tis wonderful how fast it has all been built up again in the past five years," I heard Sir Nathaniel say to Madam Ball.

Then, from further conversation between them, I

learned that in 1700 there had been both fire and hurricane in succession, which between them had nigh destroyed the town.

"Our people," the Governor continued, "have had much to dishearten them. But they come of a hardy race, not easily the prey of discouragement. They will yet build here a city second to none other in all the New World."

His voice glowed with pride as he spoke; and I could plainly see that however much of the autocrat he might be in the conduct of the affairs of the Province, his heart was with the people. Pity 'twas, as I afterwards discovered, that his head the more often led him than his heart.

As I sat silent and withdrawn from the others, I caught frequently words of the conversation going on. Sir Nathaniel was devoting himself to Madam Ball, and to his lady, while the younger members of the fair sex, gathered in a group among the cushions, were chattering away like magpies.

They talked first of the recent festivities; of the European fashions; of the ball the Governor was to give at Silk Hope shortly, and of other neighborhood affairs. Then their voices dropping to lower tones, I caught only a sentence now and then. But they were sufficient to give me the knowledge that the matter under discussion was none other than the recent sword tilt between Langdon and myself. I heard plainly the words: "Strange!" "Well-nigh incredible!" "Past belief!" "Who is he anyhow?" Then came the words, sharp and clear, from Mistress Aylmar, as though her voice were purposely raised for my ears: "Certes! it was done through some trickery. The fellow is a knave, and as such knows many tricks. Never will I believe that there was aught of fairness in it!"

"But Rose, this is unjust," a mild voice remonstrated; and because it had the clearness of a bell I heard it distinctly; and the voice was that of Madam Broughton, the Governor's daughter.

"Rose! Rose!" in further remonstrance, "what real ground have you for so accusing? You know naught of how it happened. There must have been fairness in it; otherwise the judges would not have so decided."

"I tell you how it seems to me." She had dropped her voice to a lower key, but the words still came clearly to me. "There was something in that cry of the younger man toward the last that caused Master Langdon to lose his poise, and mayhap his nerve as well. It was very clear to such of us as were watching closely."

"Caught you the words of the cry?" It was Alec who suddenly queried, and it did astonish me much to note the earnestness of her voice.

"Nay, I did not; but I am not to be shaken in my belief that they were words that palsied for the instant Master Langdon's sword arm, and so gave the victory to the younger man."

Mistress Rose, however, was not to be so convinced, and she continued stoutly to affirm her belief in my trickery, with so plain a disregard of my presence within hearing distance as sent the hot blood of indignation surging through me.

Madam Broughton's words had set me to thinking and deeply. I had before entertained the feeling that there had been something in that cry of mine, "For England and the honor of Ashtonholme!" that had momentarily disconcerted Langdon to the extent that he had lost firm grip upon his weapon. But what could it be? The more I pondered the question, the more perplexed I became.

Mistress Aylmar's sharp words, her opinion of me rankled deep. I could plainly see how enthralled she

was with that villain, Langdon; how she had been caught hard and fast in the net of his dashing ways. That he was a scoundrel, and of the deepest dye, I was still convinced, despite all I had seen and heard to the contrary. I would yet unmask him, I swore under my breath; I would show her what he really was. And by all the gods who had ever been born, I swore again, she should yet be brought to love me even as I loved her, with a love that was like a fierce sweetness in the veins.

Having calmed down at length, I grew more and more interested in the views afforded as we pushed on up the river. The stately plantation homes uprising among the trees; the broad stretches of cultivated fields; the velvety meadows where sleek cattle grazed; how much it all reminded me of the sweet and sylvan scenes of my own loved England! I could scarce believe that but twenty years agone 'twas all a virgin forest, where wild creatures roamed; and that these smiling homes were even now surrounded by the savage wilderness; that at almost any moment the bloodthirstiness of red fiends might change the peaceful scenes into those of a devastation and a horror indescribable.

As we caught clearer view now and then of a home, I could see that it was strongly built, even somewhat fortress-like in appearance, with portholes gleaming from its masonry, grim reminders that in the midst of peace the people were prepared for war.

The Governor, as though he shared my thoughts, was now talking to Madam Ball and his lady of the Indian trouble he feared was brewing; of the threatening aspect of certain of the tribes. The Savannahs, the Ogechees, the Wapoos, the Santees, and especially the Yemassees were all known foes of the white settlers. Disturbing news of the present warlike attitude of more than one of these tribes had been recently brought to Charles Town

by a band of friendly red men who had come to sell their clay pottery.

I could see that the Governor was greatly disturbed, and no wonder; for, as I learned further, he was the special target of the enmity of the Indians. He was accused, it seems, of having permitted certain lands of the Indians to be taken from them by the grasping hand of the white man. There was also the accusation against him that he had not only engaged in the slave trade, but that there had been Indians as well as black men in the groups sold on the block to be sent to the plantations.

Now and then a boat passed us going up river, much smaller boats than ours; and we met others coming down. There were many friendly greetings exchanged.

Madam's tongue kept up clacking comment at the slowness of our progress.

"Gad Lack! are we supposed to be going at a snail's pace? Why do you keep such lazy black louts?" This to the Governor. "Why do you not put them up on the block, or else use the lash on their backs?"

"We are going up-stream," he reminded her. "The boat is heavy, and 'tis hard pulling."

These words led me to believe that however autocratic the Governor might be with men of his own race, he was nevertheless merciful to his slaves.

On the stroke of noon our boat was turned and headed for the shore. Here we landed at the foot of a majestic oak that threw its long drooping moss-draped branches well out above the stream. At this spot was a lovely grass-swarded knoll, encircled by other magnificent trees, both oak and pine, and with a bubbling spring of clear, cool water. In this beautiful spot we partook of our noon repast, and, after resting an hour or so, pushed on again. In due time we came to a portion of the stream that did most unpleasantly affect me. The river, from

a broad bold stream, had narrowed and become somewhat tortuous in its windings. Now and again we passed the mouth of a lagoon, gloomy, mysterious depths, wherein, I was sure, all manner of noxious crawling things lurked. The banks were lined with giant cypress of somber appearance, and anon there were dense growths of cane and of myrtle bushes that were like jungles.

"If it were really true that Indian foes lay in wait for the Governor," ran my thoughts, "here would be the most favorable place for an attack."

I could see the Governor casting searching glances from bank to bank. That he was uneasy, it needed no words to tell me.

Quick and sharp his order rang out to the rowers, "You are running too near the western bank! Move further out into the stream."

His uneasiness caught and drew my attention; I, too, became keenly on the watch. Suddenly I started. Had I really had glimpse of something vividly red like tuft of feathers upon a bird? Was that an animal moving in the shrubbery, or something else? And what was that I now glimpsed, lurking against the bole of the tree? The next instant I saw clearly; the curve of a bow held tensely, the gleam of a poised arrow ready to speed on its mission of death; arrow aimed straight at the Governor.

"Beware, sir!" I cried, springing up and hastening to him; and at that very moment the arrow sped by me, tearing through the cloth of my coat at the shoulder. It struck upon an outspread fold of Madam Broughton's dress, pinning it to the floor, and missing the Governor's head by only a few inches. Speedily upon it came the second arrow, striking one of the oarsmen where the first one had just missed me, in the shoulder.

There was a scream of pain from the man as he toppled over; feminine shrieks as the group of maidens scurried toward us, and mingling with these varied cries and exclamations of astonishment and alarm.

"God's mercy!" cried out Madam Ball; "are we all to be murdered by those red fiends yonder? Quick! you sluggards," to the rowers, "and get the boat away."

Quickened into action by their own alarm as well as by Madam's sharp words, the boat was propelled swiftly around the curve of a protecting island.

The Governor, white and shaken, gave further orders; and shortly calmness was restored.

Having assisted Sir Nathaniel in caring for the wounded black man, as best could be done in the circumstances; and having noted, too, the disadvantage under which the oarsmen were laboring for lack of their full quota, I now offered to take the place of the wounded man.

At first, Sir Nathaniel strongly demurred. It was no place for me, he said. Then he began to question, did I know aught of rowing? I had been considered far from a novice in the handling of the oars in my college days, I told him.

At this there came to me quick exclamations of surprise and incredulity; one that was plainly contemptuous; and again that giggling sound that so annoyed me.

This continuous show of disbelief in me on the part of these maids did truly nettle me, and I then and there resolved to repay them.

I had no more than taken my seat and reached for the oar in its lock, when there came a dash of water in my face. It all but strangled me, and in my efforts to recover my breath I let the oar drop. It went over the

side of the boat, and, but for the efforts of the black man just behind me, would have been lost.

I recovered my breath and my sight in time to see that minx, Alec, moving away and fair shaking with merriment.

"Ha!" cackled a voice in shrill enjoyment, " 'tis quite plain to be seen, young sir, that you have found favor in the eyes of yon madcap maid; otherwise no note would she take of you."

At these amazing words from Madam Ball, I cast again quick glance in the direction of the maid, who, to serve her own amusement, had thus sought to discomfort me. Greatly astonished was I by the quick change in her which Madam's words had brought about. Before there had been naught but a mischievous spirit rampant in her eyes; but now, as she turned her head away from my searching glance, I saw a surge of red dye her cheek. She had behaved with the manners of a saucy boy, yet now was I sure that she was blushing with the rosiness of a love apple, all maid.

Madam's tongue was clacking again, and this time the Governor was the target for her remarks.

"That chit is yet capable of some scandalous behavior, if you do not tighten the reins on her. But what better can you expect, when her mother was a spitfire—I don't care if she was the daughter of a titled gentleman—and her father a devil-may-care, given to wandering up and down the earth?"

Whereas some moments before I had felt the itch to seize and shake the madcap Alec, because of the prank she had played me, I now was truly sorry for her, mightily so in fact. 'Twas a scandal in itself, the way Madam's shameless tongue was running on.

Then from further conversation, principally between the Governor and Madam Ball, I learned that the maid's

name was Alecia Hastings, and that she was an orphan. Her mother had died some five or six years ago of the fever; and her father, a gallant soldier, despite Madam's dubbing him a devil-may-care, had joined the expedition against the Spaniards at St. Augustine and fallen in battle. Since then the maid, a twin brother, and a small sister had been the wards of the Governor. The boy was away at school. Alec and the little sister were members of the household at Silk Hope, where the former led its inmates, including the staid Governor himself, a merry dance.

CHAPTER X

AT SILK HOPE PLANTATION, I MEET WITH FURTHER ODD EXPERIENCES

We made stop at Mulberry Hill, the home of Madam Broughton, so that she might attend to some domestic affairs ere going on to Silk Hope, there to remain till the return of her husband.

Thus the westering sun was well down behind the trees when we reached the landing at Silk Hope. The black oarsmen ran the boat deftly to shore. I had previously dropped my own oar, to ease my smarting palms; and now, with a precipitancy I had planned, I hurried forward in order to anticipate the Governor in assisting the ladies to land. I had the ardent longing to feel my lady's slender hand in mine if only for the briefest moment.

As the evening shadows had gathered and the air on the river had become cooler, the young ladies had removed their great hats, and each was now enveloped in a long cloak, with the hood drawn over the head.

The Governor, seeing my eagerness, had smilingly given me precedence with a kindliness that made my heart bound in gratitude.

Mistress Coming made suspicious haste to land, merely touching the tips of my fingers, while the madcap Alec clung to my hand unnecessarily long, smiling amusedly into my face as she did so.

I could see that Mistress Rose was purposely holding back, with a look of disdain. But I was not to be thwarted.

I had stepped forward, and was extending my hand,

when there came a voice as smooth as silk, and the words, "Permit me."

A hand went past mine, a hand white and shapely, with a fall of lace at the wrist.

I wheeled to find Langdon standing there, smiling and debonair, his handsome face aglow, his glance first mockingly regarding me, then all admiring as it was turned upon Mistress Rose.

As she extended her hand eagerly to meet his, I gazed at her fairly bewildered, for never had I seen so swift nor so great a change come over anyone.

At sight of Langdon she had given a little burst of tremulous laughter; then I saw the quick red dye her cheeks at his ardent gaze, while the eyes that had flashed such disdain of me, now grew softly luminous. Then her eyes drooped and the long lashes quivered against her cheeks. The hood had slipped back from her head, and the face was revealed in all its softness and sweetness.

At the moment that she extended her hand to meet Langdon's the boat swayed gently. It was but a slight undulation, and I could have sworn that what followed was all premeditated on her part. There was the pretense of losing her balance, an effort to regain her footing, and the next instant she went full into Langdon's arms.

He made no haste to release her, but bore her thus to the wharf ere setting her down.

As I stood frowning, my fingers clenched, I heard Madam Ball's clacking laugh behind me. As she passed me, she tapped me upon the shoulder, saying:

"Have a care, youngster; yon goes a man 'twere the maddest sort of folly to interfere with."

No doubt the old dame meant this kindly; but I was in no mood at the time to receive it as such. I was hot with anger as I stood watching the two walking away

now, side by side, up the path to the house; he all-admiring and devoted; she apparently hanging upon his every word and look. Now the meaning of the Governor's words struck at me with full force, "A Rose all thorns, but a Rose of velvet to the master hand."

But Langdon should not triumph over me, this I swore under my breath and roundly. He should not take her from me, my peerless Rose. Despite his graceful manner, his handsome face, and fine figure of a man, he was unworthy of her; a cheat, a rascal, a marauder who sailed under the black flag; yea, he was more, he was thief and cutthroat. I would yet tear the mask from his smirking face.

I was downcast but not defeated; for, despite barriers, Love will dream of fulfilment, since Hope springs eternal in the breast of man.

There was a bustling scene all about the landing. Black men had hurried down to meet their master and assist with the luggage. There were black women, too, with gaily turbaned heads; and standing about among them half-clad little Africans gazing curiously at us. These new strange creatures, with their shining black faces, thick lips and woolly hair did still engage my curiosity.

Waiting to speak to the Governor, and evidently having news of importance, was a short stout man in broad-brimmed palmetto hat, a suit of white linen considerably soiled, and a pipe hanging from his mouth. Pipe and hat he removed on the approach of the ladies. This was, as I learned, one Jonathan Mullins, overseer of the Silk Hope plantation.

I had now to give up my little Cupid to one of the black men, whom the Governor directed to take the dog and care for him. I knew not what was to befall my little comrade, and my heart went sad over the parting,

which I hoped would not be for long. But I knew full well I could not take the dog into the house.

The landing at Silk Hope was near the beginning of the wide, oak-bordered avenue leading up to the house. The building crowned a terrace that rose gradually from the water. It was of two stories, somewhat rambling in appearance, but of generous proportions. Noble trees, the oak, the pine and the hickory, clustered about it, and there were wide stretches of greensward dotted with well-kept shrubbery, beds of flowers, and trellises of carefully pruned flowering vines that wafted their rich fragrance to us.

As we moved on up the path we came shortly to where Langdon and Mistress Rose had paused for a space, he to gather a nosegay for her, for which she swept him a gay courtesy.

As they went on again, I caught view of that audacious minx, Mistress Alecia Hastings, walking close behind them, making grimaces and imitating Langdon's somewhat affected gait. The sight did mightily please me, and by it I gained the knowledge that there was at least one thing in common between the madcap and myself, no very high opinion of Master Langdon.

As we approached the house I saw that it had a friendly, hospitable air. The great main doors were wide open, and already lights were twinkling within. Yet I saw, too, that like the majority of the homes in the Carolina wilderness of that day, Silk Hope House had a somewhat fortress-like appearance. 'Tis true there were tall chimneys, homelike gables, windows of myriads of tiny panes set in with lead; and fan-lights above the great doorway; but the windows had heavy wooden shutters to protect them, while along the basement gleamed portholes.

There was a wide hallway, which we entered, and

leading therefrom to an open gallery a staircase with handsomely carved balustrades. At a bend in this staircase I paused to regard, set in a niche, a tall clock of somewhat odd appearance. It was indeed of a most curious workmanship, and I wondered whence it had come. It ran for a week, then had to be pulled up again. It showed the phases of the moon and struck the hours and half-hours by means of tunable bells. The works were enclosed in a handsome walnut frame carved with designs of leaves and flowers. In a semicircle over the top of the dial were quaint faces showing the moon's increase from quarter to full. Below the face of the clock were the words carved deep:

"Time shows the way
To life's decay."

The sight of the old clock did make me both thoughtful and sad. How true it was! We should all soon be dust, even the young and gay. For each one of us Time would be no more. The present would be the past. Life's gay attire would give place to the pale shroud of the coffin, and the joys of earth to the grim silence of the tomb. But it would not end there, thanks be to the promise of a better life beyond the present one to the man who loved mercy, dealt justly with his fellow men, and walked humbly in the sight of his Maker.

In the midst of this heartening reflection there entered a discord. Langdon came up the stairs and passed me. I felt rather than saw his mocking smile. How was I to "walk humbly" so long as the bitter rage against this man, who had so foully wronged me, dwelt in my heart? But such as he needed to be unmasked for the good of the community, for that of the whole Province, in fact; more especially for the salvation of the woman I loved.

What would be her fate wedded to this black-hearted villain? I went all a-tremble thinking of it.

My room was high up under the eaves, but well lighted, and of goodly proportions. There was a window that looked out over the garden, a most beautiful garden, where all manner of sweet smelling things were growing. The room was situated in a half-circular gable-like projection of the building, a "flanker," I afterwards learned it was called, and I had no more than entered it and looked about when a great wave of homesickness swept over me. So much did it remind me of my own room, high up in the west tower of my far-away Sussex home, the tower where the ivy clung and the sun, shining through the mullioned windows, made a blaze of glory.

So great was my sick longing at that moment for my own home in Bonnie England, there came a rush of tears as I sank into a seat, my head dropped upon my hands. But I soon realized this would not do. I must conquer the weakness. That for which I had come to this strange land called for a man and not a weakling.

As I looked about me I saw that the room had much to awaken pleasant thoughts. The furniture was newly polished and shining. There was a gray silvered paper on the walls with clusters of pink roses intertwined in green leaves. Dainty curtains were at the windows, while around the bed were other curtains of fine damask.

There were guests at the great house. This the black boy, who had shown me to my room, had told me.

As I entered the supper room I found most of the company gathered. In the moments I had, ere all had assembled, there was ample opportunity to look about the apartment. It was a long, somewhat high-ceiled room with handsomely panelled walls and shining wainscoting. Great panelled doors with polished brass knobs

led into it. At one end was a wide chimney-place, from which a fire was now sending forth its glow, for when the night had fallen the air had grown chill. The massive mantelpiece was beautifully carved in garlands of flowers with the heads of Cupids in their midst. Set into the chimney itself, in some raised work, was the coat-of-arms of the Governor.

Last of all to enter the room were Mistress Rose and Langdon. They had come in together, she blushing and smiling, he with the usual smirk upon his face. I had to admit that he was of more than personable appearance on this occasion. He was in truth dashingly handsome in his suit of black velvet and shirt of fine linen and lace—the latest importation from Europe, I was sure. His own hair, which I knew to be sprinkled with gray, since I had so discovered when once his peruke was awry, was covered by a peruke of glossy brown ringlets that fell to his shoulders. I took unto myself much satisfaction that I was free from affectation of this kind. I was proud to wear my own hair unadorned by peruke. I had much gratification in my own thickly curling locks, which I wore tied back with a ribbon. Neither did I powder them, not caring to injure the gloss.

The supper room was bright with the glow of fire and the light of candles. Added to this was the flash of jewels and the radiant colors of the ladies' gowns.

In the center of the apartment was set the great shining mahogany table, with its spotless damask napery gleaming like satin; the glitter of finely cut glass; the sparkle of silver, the transparent gleam of fragile china, and laden with an array of the most tempting viands. Never had I seen such lavish display of food even in my own prosperous English home. There were several kinds of meats, and fish from the river; breads, hot and cold; pastries, custards, and other sweets.

As I was to discover, each well-to-do family of the Province kept its own Indian hunter, whose duty it was to procure venison, game, wild turkey from the forests, fish from the streams, and other delicacies for the table. Sir Nathaniel had two of these men attached to his establishment.

There were two guests at Silk Hope in addition to Madam Ball and Mistress Anne Coming; one for the night only, the other had come to stay for the remainder of the week. These were Sir Christopher Bandy, whom I had met aboard the *Abigail and Anne,* a member of the Governor's Council, and a strong ally; and Sir John Coming, a planter of Goose Creek and father to Mistress Anne. Sir John, as I was to learn, had his title by inheritance, and was not many years out from England. Sir Christopher, on the other hand, was of the class stamped by Major Popple as "Penny Barons."

At first the conversation was all of town and neighborhood affairs, principally those of a commercial and military nature. The Governor was warmly praised for the steps he had taken to so strongly fortify the town as well as to garrison the neighborhood.

There were white foes of the Colony, even more to be dreaded than the red savages. Both the French and the Spaniards, it appeared, were determined to drive out the English colonists and gain possession of the country. The former laid claim to the Province as a part of New France and the latter as being a portion of Florida.

It was feared that the present plan of these white foes of the Carolina settlers was for the French to attack the Colony by way of the sea, while the Spaniards, of the garrison at St. Augustine, no more than a hundred leagues or so away, invaded it by land. There was rumor of a French fleet massing for the purpose of entering Charles Town harbor.

"Well, if they do come," said the Governor proudly, "they will find us prepared."

Wisdom, too, had been shown in preparing the plantation homes against Indian attack. Musketry and ammunition were stored in each, together with a supply of provisions calculated to last through a siege of weeks. All these matters were amicably discussed.

Then, somehow, I do not know just how, the conversation all at once turned upon the Church Acts.

One Master Boone, it seemed, had been sent to London by the Dissenters, to take the place of Master Ash, so cruelly treated; and to make plea of the Queen for the annulment of the "iniquitous legislation," as it was termed.

The conversation waxed warm as to the stand the Queen would take in the matter.

"She can do naught else, gentlemen," said Sir Nathaniel confidently, "but to take the side of law and order. She has the good of the Colony at heart, and is far too greatly concerned to do aught that will turn it over to the rabble."

"Piffle!" exclaimed Madam Ball. "What does Anne really know of conditions in the Colony? And Gr'a' mercy, sir! what would she care if she did know, wrapped up as she is in her own affairs and the Marlboroughs?"

"Madam," replied the Governor, and with a touch of asperity, "the Queen has been fully informed as to conditions in the Colony."

"To be sure! one-sided information. La! La!" she broke off with one of her cackling laughs; "I'm hoping me strongly that Master Boone will yet outwit the connivance of that arch-marplot, Granville, and not only reach the ear of the Queen; but that Anne will show wisdom as well as a sense of justice, and do away with

that monstrous Act that is destined to bring this fair Province to the verge of ruin if allowed to stand."

"I, too, am hoping for a display of wisdom on the Queen's part."

It was Sir John Coming who spoke. The words were gently said but with much earnestness.

"With the troubles that threaten us from abroad," he continued, "we cannot afford to have these bickerings and wranglings going on at home. 'Tis a most shameful sight; even godly men arrayed against each other; the whole Province torn by dissension. And 'tis not only shameless but 'tis folly of the maddest sort."

Wisely spoken I thought, and from that moment I began to feel strong liking for Sir John Coming.

He was indeed a man of most personable appearance, a gentleman born, mild of temperament, yet of forceful character; an ardent Churchman, as I was to learn, yet arrayed against the Church Acts.

"What would you, man?" blazed Sir Christopher; "let these swine have their own way? Turn the Province over to the riff-raff? Set up the commonalty over the heads of noblemen? Stand back and witness these pharisaical ranters array their mongrel religion against that of the one true and only Church, that founded by Almighty God Himself? No, sir! By the Eternal I say never, sir! I'll take to the sword first before I'll submit to any such state of affairs."

"I hold it as the divine right of every man," replied Sir John, and still mildly, "as divine as the right of Kings themselves, that he shall be allowed to worship his Maker as his conscience calls him to do. And no one," there was a ring of deeper earnestness in the voice, "be he the King himself, has the prerogative to deprive even the lowliest of men of such divine right."

"Oh, sir, that is true! Your words are most nobly

spoken. To worship God as one's heart believes to be right is a God-given privilege. And 'tis a monstrous shame, say I, that a man must have the liberties of a freeman taken from him because he cannot conscientiously subscribe to the creed of another."

The words were spoken in a full deep even melodious voice, and I was most amazed to discover that they had come from that madcap maid, Alecia Hastings, she whom, up to this time, I had rated as light of brain. Deeply astonished, too, was I to witness the change in her.

I had not noted before how bonnie was the light in the brown eyes; how comely of feature she really was, what a sweet dignity could be hers. But it made my heart beat not one whit the faster. The graces of all other women were overshadowed by My Lady's loveliness.

"La! La!" twitted Madam, with a quick glance in Mistress Alecia's direction, "what does a chit like you know of such matters?"

"Madam, I know enough about them to have my heart ache and ache at what I both hear and see."

"Lass," reproved the Governor, frowning at her, "thou hast an over-free tongue; too nimble by far for one of your sex."

"'Tis thought of that Huguenot lover of hers, handsome Raoul St. Julien," I heard Madam say in lowered tones, "that doth quicken her tongue. But 'tis truly womanly of her to thus defend his rights, since I am sure now that she loves him."

I had been waiting to see if Langdon would join in the discussion. I was in an itch to know where he stood in the matter. But evidently there was no inclination on his part to take sides either in one way or another. He was too busy paying court to Mistress Rose, who sat regarding him with glowing face.

"But man alive!" the Governor was saying in reply to some remark Sir John Coming had just made. "Can't you see how the upholding of the Church Acts is not only in the interest of law and order but the salvation itself of the entire Colony? And the Queen herself must see it and act accordingly, or ruin ensues."

"Yes, by Gad, sir!" boomed Sir Christopher, "she's got to see it. There's no other way. She's got to stand by the upper class of this Colony; take care to it that this vulgar breed, this scum of the earth gets no hand upon the government of the land designed by the King himself to be the home of gentlemen, to be ruled by them and none others, sir."

He was fair to bursting in his spleen. He was a man of pompous manner, showy dress, and of a most irascible temper. It did amuse me greatly when I afterwards heard how he had come over in the hold of one of the ships, had acquired a little money and began to deal in African slaves. He had thus made a small fortune with which the requisite amount of land had been purchased that gave him the desired title.

"Have you forgotten, friend," Sir John mildly reminded him, "that no small number of these men and women, whom you have recklessly designated as a vulgar breed and the scum of the earth, are of high birth, the very flower of the English Puritans; the men graduates of Oxford and Cambridge, the women daughters of noblemen?"

"No matter, sir. So long as they fail to subscribe to the tenets of the one and only Church, they are heretics, and as such unfit to have hand in the government of the land over which that Church has been set supreme."

"My sentiments exactly, sir," commented the Governor. "It is nothing more than justice, right, despite what these canting babblers claim."

"Piffle-paffle!" ejaculated Madam. "Justice? Right? Forsooth, 'tis nothing of the kind, and well you know it! To your way of thinking that which suits you is right, while everything that's against your liking is wrong. Gad, man! don't be blinded to what is justice and right. You have no more right to dictate to a man what his religion shall be than you have to meddle with the way he builds his house or with the manner of food he sets upon his table. Open your eyes to that, then can you prate of justice and right."

"Madam," remonstrated the Governor, "your speech is far too caustic." There was a spot of red in each cheek as he paused to adjust his ruffles. "In this country of freemen, every man, and every woman, too, for that matter, has the right to his own opinion, as well as to the freedom to express it."

"Gad lack! 'tis so, is it? And yet, sir, you hound these Dissenters for daring to have theirs!"

" 'Tis no more than should be done to the heretics," replied the Governor warmly. "It is treasonable speech they utter, and for such the hand of authority should fall heavily upon them."

"And it is the enforcement of the Church Acts, and no less," declared Sir Christopher, "that will bring these ranters to their senses."

"The Church Acts! The Church Acts!" snapped Madam. "I am surfeited to sickness hearing of the Church Acts. As if there were naught else in this world to prate about but the Church Acts. Gr'a' mercy, sir, if you would but wage war against the devil with the same vigor with which you pour out your venom upon these hapless Dissenters, this Province would be purged of its wickedness from end to end."

Madam Johnson now gave the signal for the ladies to rise and retire. Neither she nor Madam Broughton had

taken any part in the discussion; though I could see that both were displeased by the severity of Madam Ball's speech. Truth to tell, it was a display of discourtesy on the part of Madam, a guest, and an old friend of the family, that was most astonishing. But, as I was already discovering, Madam was not one to curb her tongue at any time. She would give it free rein even in the presence of the Queen herself.

Madam Ball now arose from the table with a surprising nimbleness for one of her years. The tiny gray ringlets clustered about her forehead began to stir animatedly as she shook her head vigorously. The gown of brilliantly flowered cloth that she wore gave out a rustling sound as she moved.

"Wrong! all wrong!" she said, and there was a deep earnestness, even a gentleness in her voice; "as you will soon discover, my friends," here she glanced first at Sir Christopher and then at the Governor. "You are striking at the very foundation stone of the Colony, human liberty; and free-born men will not submit to it. If you persist in your blind course the first thing you know, the whole Colony will be in a blaze of revolt. These men will take matters in their own hands; they will spill their blood, if need be, in the cause of human rights. Forsooth, gentlemen, disabuse your minds of the bigoted belief that the one and only way by which men and women can hope to enter Heaven is by following out the lines of the Prayer Book."

When the ladies retired we gathered about the handsome mahogany sideboard that extended fully half-way across one side of the room, and glittered with an array of goblets and vessels of many sizes and shapes.

While the wine flowed freely, the discussion went on. From it I learned that, despite the absence of so many of the commoners from the Assembly, the Church Acts

had passed by the bare majority of one vote. The Churchmen themselves were divided with reference to it. More than one of these had expressed the wish to make public record of his opposition to the Acts, but was not permitted to do so.

Among the prominent men of the Colony who were staunchly supporting the Governor in his course were Chief Justice Trott, foremost lawyer of the Province, and Colonel William Rhett, at the head of its military affairs. These men had assured the Governor as to the legality of the enactment and were pledged to support him in its enforcement.

The liveliest aspect of the discussion then being carried on in the Governor's dining-room, the matter of the deepest concern to each one was, what would the Queen do? Would she take steps to have the law annulled, or would she give the Governor free rein to proceed against the Dissenters?

Sir John was of the opinion that Queen Anne was at that time too deeply engrossed with more serious affairs —the war on the Continent, the fast gathering storm of the combat between the Whigs and Tories at home, to concern herself with the wrangling in this far-distant Colony. The Governor and Sir Christopher, however, were firm in the belief that the Queen would act, and promptly, in the matter. Confident were they, too, that her decision would be to uphold the legality of the Church law.

I left them still deep in the discussion, but contending good-naturedly now, for the wines had had a mellowing effect.

As I passed the door of the drawing-room, I caught the sweet notes of a harp. 'Twas skillful fingers that played it. The door standing ajar, I considered it no breach of good manners to seek to discover who the

musician could be. But I might have known. 'Twas none other than my beauteous Rose. Beside her stood that scoundrel Langdon, and bending so near his shoulder almost touched the lovely head. I could have entered and throttled him with good grace, proclaiming to Rose then and there who he was. But I could gain nothing by so doing; more like would lose all, as I promptly realized. I must be patient, abide the time when I could proceed with surety to his undoing. But it enraged me almost beyond endurance to have constant reminder how strongly he was established in the favor of the one woman of all the world of women, she whom I adored with every fiber of my being.

CHAPTER XI

I MAKE A DISCOVERY THAT STIRS ME TO ACTION

THE night had fallen sometime since. I reached my room and sought the window that looked out upon the garden, from which many sweet scents were coming. There were varied sounds too, that I caught; the soft whisper of the wind through the trees; the cooing of a pair of love-birds in a near-by oak; the distant murmur of the river. All bespoke peacefulness, even happiness; but of such my thoughts did not partake. Of a truth, my mind was in a ferment. That which I had heard in the supper room had greatly disturbed me. If affairs of the Colony were really in such a state of chaos; if men were ready to leap at each other's throats, if war threatened from without as well as from within, what hope could I hold of following out successfully the mission on which I had come? Where in this wild land of disorder and strife was the brother I sought? Held back by the difficulties that barred the way at the very beginning of my quest, where could I hope to look for clue to guide me?

As if troubles enough had not beset me, I had now fallen in love, and with a woman who plainly showed her contempt of me. Not only this, but whose heart, as was quite plain, was fast held by another. But this should not be, I swore yet again, and fiercely, that villain should be unmasked. There were surely proofs somewhere to be had of his perfidy; and I then and there took oath that I would spend my whole life's effort, if need be, to the finding of them. I would yet win the woman I loved if I went through fire and water to do

it. No matter if some wise one had reminded that the road to happiness is oft beset with many hazards.

I was restless, unhappy enough now. I walked aimlessly about the room. I strolled again and again to the window and looked out. The night was hastening on, but still lights glimmered here and there throughout the plantation.

Curiosity seized me to see more of those strange black creatures, whose quarters were some little distance from the great house. How did they pass the time when free from toil? What odd aspects of existence would they present in their home life? I was curious to discover.

I left my room and descended the stairs. There was a stillness throughout the great house; but its inmates had not all retired, as was evidenced by the streaks of light beneath two or three of the doors. I found a side-door unlocked, and put the key in my pocket. A careless servant would not, I hoped, notice its absence.

The way was lit by a silvery moon glimmering through the branches of the trees. Fireflies flashed here and there; a mock-bird suddenly sent forth a trill of melody from one of the low-hanging boughs.

I found the wicket gate leading into the mulberry grove; opened it, and passed on toward the negro quarters. I had no more than entered a broad street between two rows of cabins, when there came the sharp clang of a bell. Nine strokes I counted, and then, as though by magic, every light in the cabins went out. What was I to do? Turn back, of course, and leave curiosity unsatisfied till another time. But I would at least walk on up the street and thus get some idea of the manner in which the Governor housed his black slaves. The moon gave sufficient light for this.

I had reached the ends of the rows of cabins, and was peering about me, when some distance across the space

in front of me, seemingly along the edge of a forest, I caught the twinkling of lights. What did it mean? I wondered. Was there at that point the quarters of other slaves? And were they not so mindful of the warning notes of the bell? Then a thought struck me that brought with it a quickened beat of the heart. Perhaps over there, within the recesses of the forest, a band of these black creatures, bolder than others, were carrying out some mystic rite, indulging in the performance of one of the orgies that had been so vital a part of the old savage life. A lively curiosity was again awakened within me. I would get view of that in which those strange black beings were engaged.

I went on, picking my way cautiously, with a remembrance of the treacherous marshes that lay in some of the open spaces, containing pools of black slime, and against which I had been warned. Now and again a sinuously gliding form and a sibilant sound kept me wide awake to another danger; made me walk carefully, for I had no fancy for being stung by one of the venomous things that lurked in the grass.

The forest was farther away than I had thought; and even after I entered it, as plainly it appeared the lights had receded. But I went on determinedly. As I passed along, various tiny denizens of the woods peered at me, with small twinkling eyes, from the undergrowth or from low-hanging bough; while others scurried away at the first sound of footfalls.

The trees were growing fewer, and the underbrush more scattered; the lights, too, were more distinct, and I caught queer sounds that all but startled me. There was need now of more caution, as I quickly became aware. I stooped low, creeping from one clump of bushes to another. Then suddenly, as I partly raised up to peer carefully about me, I looked upon a scene

that all but brought sharp outcry from me. Had it done so I surely would have been discovered. For I was near enough now to see clearly all that was going on before me.

It was a kind of open glade in the midst of the forest, and surrounded by a growth of the dark green, glossy-leafed bush I had learned was the wax myrtle. It was within a clump of these that I now crouched.

In the center of the space, with the light of torches playing full upon them, was a band of savages, with hideously painted faces and bedecked in all manner of glittering attire. Greatly astonished was I as I saw that they were not black men, carrying out the rites of some orgy, but red savages, the bitter foes of the white people of the Colony. They had evidently been engaged in a dance, for they were still treading some of the steps as they circled about one who, to all appearance, was their leader. He was of a tall commanding figure, the chaplet of feathers and of glittering beads that adorned his head giving to him an added height. Falling about him was a mantle of ermine-like texture from which numerous jewels flashed. He bore himself in regal manner; and, as 'twas quite plain from the obeisance of these red savages as they circled about him, he was to them a king, or mayhap a god to be thus worshipped.

Suddenly he raised his head and glanced full toward the spot where I crouched; and now indeed I came within a hair's breadth of betraying myself by startled cry. The man who thus played king in the midst of these red savages, who received their obeisances as the due of a sovereign, was none other than Henry Langdon, gentleman planter of Goose Creek, member of the Assembly, head of the Committee of Safety of the Colony, acknowledged suitor for the hand of the Governor's kinswoman, Mistress Rose Aylmar! Langdon, of a

truth it was, and none other! There was no mistaking that air, the manner of the gestures, that peculiar cock of the head, and now I heard his voice plainly.

Had he seen me, I wondered, as I drew back swiftly? Would he be upon me the next moment, with my life in his hands and those of these red fiends? I hardly dared to breathe as I crouched there, awaiting the catastrophe that might overtake me at any moment. But the minutes passed, and I still lay there undisturbed.

Now I caught the low murmur of voices, and, cautiously venturing to take a look, I saw that he was giving some directions to the savages gathered about him, gesturing as he did so.

If I hoped to escape, it must be at this time; for once the gathering broke up and the savages scattered, as they were likely to do, I would surely be discovered.

I was all a-tremble as I gained the outskirts of the forest, and my heart was beating loudly. What was the meaning of the scene on which I had just looked? That it could portend no good, I was assured. The red men were the avowed foes of the Colony. They had threatened war, and were even now known to be preparing for it. And here was Langdon one with them, not only a sharer in their savage rites, but—obeyed, acclaimed as a god—Langdon, whom I knew to be not what he professed, but thief and scoundrel, a maurauder of the seas.

What should I do? Inform the Governor, of course. It was my duty to do it. Peril threatened. It would be most reprehensible of me, criminally so, in fact, if I kept silent. Hold my tongue and let these red fiends and this black villain wreak their will upon the Colony? Never while I had tongue with which to speak. Here was the proof I had wanted of the perfidy of this plotter against the peace and safety of men, this conscienceless thief of women's hearts.

As I made my way to the house I kept pondering over how it was that these red fiends had succeeded in gathering undetected for one of their savage rites so close to the home of the Governor. Of course, as I saw clearly at length, it was due to the scheming of the chief villain himself, the black-hearted Langdon.

The Governor had not retired, as I hoped would be the case when I reached the house. I found him in the small room off the library, where most of his business was transacted.

He was bending over some writing, but glanced up, as I entered. In the light of the candles his face looked haggard and worn. It was that of a man overburdened with cares and perplexities. How could I add further to the heavy load of anxiety he was already carrying? But it was a duty that had to be performed; and so, with but few preliminaries, I went straight to the heart of the matter and told him fully of what I had just seen in the forest.

At first his face was incredulous, unbelieving, the countenance of a man who had heard that which partook of the nature of the impossible, that was beyond the pall of credence. Then it changed to the look of one who was startled.

"You believe that you saw this thing?" he asked somewhat unsteadily.

"Your Excellency, I know that I saw it."

"And you believe that it partook of the sinister nature you have accused?"

"What else could it be, Your Excellency? Plainly I saw with mine own eyes that which I have described; a band of fiendish looking red men at their wild orgies, and in their midst, plainly acclaimed as their leader, nay more, worshipped as a god, this man, Henry Lang-

don, who calls himself gentleman, and soldier of the Queen; who professes to be ——"

What more I would have said was cut short by quick exclamation from the Governor. I turned and followed his glance. There in the doorway, smiling, nonchalant, and in the same faultless attire he had worn at supper, stood Henry Langdon.

"You have heard?" queried the Governor.

"I have heard; and I have this to say, Your Excellency; the man standing there is either knave or lunatic; 'twere hard to decide which."

Then, as he sent me a glance like the flash of steel, he demanded:

"What display of idiocy is this, Mutton-head?"

"You know well enough 'tis no idiocy but the plain truth," I answered him, meeting his gaze fully.

"And you have no more intelligence, you Jack-pudding, than to stand before His Excellency with this cock-and-bull story of having seen me, but a short time agone, in yon forest engaged in orgy with vile red men, the sworn enemies of this Colony? Certes! whatever of the nature of sense once lodged in that pate of yours has taken its flight."

"You can regard it thus if it so pleases you," I told him, giving him glance as steady as his own; "but you know as well as that you are standing there, that I speak but the truth. 'Twere barely a half hour agone that I saw you in the forest in the midst of red savages, and holding high carnival with them."

"Certes, fellow," he taunted me, "you have been asleep, and the devil himself brought you wild dream." Then, as his fingers played with a ringlet of his peruke, which was as carefully curled as though he had just tended it, he added. "Now do I know you to be more ass than knave."

I felt myself grow warm under his mocking glance.

"You can brazen it out," I told him, "if such be your choice. You can stand there and mock and jeer all that it pleases you; you can deny and deny till no further word can be added; but naught that you can say, no position of denial you can assume, can alter the fact for one moment that, for some evil purpose of your own, you are in league with red men against the whites of the Colony."

Now I saw the fire leap into his eyes.

"By the Lord Harry!" he cried out, and turning toward the Governor, "the fellow is not only drunken with wine, but he is out of every one of his five senses, if ever he had so many. Out upon you, sirrah," this to me, "for both knave and simpleton!"

His manner, his look, his words awakened a hot wrath within me. I knew that I was right. Here before me stood the man, whom, beyond the shadow of a doubt, I had seen with the Indians in the forest. Villain, schemer, black-hearted plotter against the land he had adopted, vile traitor to the men whose hands he clasped in friendship, he was all these, and more. And yet he stood there, brazenly flouting me, seeking to discredit me by terming me simpleton, knave, winebibber, and the like. I grew hotter still as I remembered that he was not only villain, vile schemer against the peace of those he professed to hold as friends, but that he was also none other than that thieving brigand of the seas, the pirate Black Locks himself. Now would I accuse him of it, no matter what befell me.

As though in some manner he had divined my thoughts, and ere I could speak out to accuse him, he turned to the Governor with burst of laughter, and clapping his thigh as though at the remembrance of some monstrously fine joke, broke forth:

"To show Your Excellency what a lack-wit this fellow is, what wild hallucinations doth take possession of his senses, I have this to tell you, that there in Charles Town, no more than a day or so agone, he did accuse me of being none other than that bold robber of the seas, Black Locks, who did fleece him of certain valuables and papers as he came hither to the Colony."

The Governor gave sharp exclamation, and turned to regard me with a look that said plainly I must surely be dispossessed of my wits.

"And are you not?" I flung out at Langdon, for now was I nettled beyond control. "Are you not that same black-hearted villain, that same piratical scoundrel who did fleece me and others aboard the *Abigail and Anne?*"

"Lucifer take you, sirrah, for both marplot and liar!" he blazed at me. "You shall answer to me for this."

"At your service, sir," I told him, as I bowed.

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" remonstrated the Governor; "this will never do." He was plainly distressed.

"I give you this to remember your insult to me," Langdon said, as he strode swiftly toward me. His hand was uplifted, and his plain intent was to strike me.

But, as he neared me, his hand fell as suddenly as it had been lifted, and he stopped short, staring at me, while a swift change passed over his countenance.

"Nay," he said, and I was amazed by the singular inflection in the voice. "I cannot fight with you!"

What did it mean? Was it intended as an insult? Did he mean to infer that I was too far beneath him to be engaged with in gentlemanly encounter? But somehow, though the words had riled me at first, I could not consider them as conveying an offense. That look, the tone of voice, his strange manner did not bear this out. What, then, could be the meaning of it?

While I stood to some extent confused, not knowing

what to say or do next, a voice, deep musical, rang through the silence. It was Mistress Rose who entered, a sheaf of papers in her hand.

"I came to bring writing for His Excellency that I had finished," she was saying, "and I hear voices in loud tones as of those who are quarreling. What can it mean?" She glanced from one to the other of us, a look of perplexity upon the lovely face. In the gaze she bestowed upon Langdon, however, there was anxiety as well as enquiry. Plainly all her concern was for him.

"What is the matter?" she queried anxiously as she approached him. "Is there trouble?"

"Oh, no," he replied, with a shake of the head, and now he boldly put an arm about her. "It is all just a joke, dear; but there has been some excitement, I must admit." Then he told her, treating it laughingly all the while. But she was in no mood to receive it as humor.

"My faith! but you are an insolent upstart!" she exclaimed, as she turned on me, her eyes flashing scorn. "In mercy's name," she continued, "how many kinds of a dolt are you to have even held thought that such monstrous fabrications would be believed? Gr'a' mercy! When next you undertake to hatch out mare's egg such as this, you should search for whetstone with which to sharpen your wits."

She turned now to address the Governor.

"Your Excellency, this man, who calls himself Mark Ashton, is no innocent concoctor of tales. He is a meddler, a schemer, one envious of, and therefore bent on doing all the harm in his power to those above him. Nay, more, he is an adventurer, seeking his own gain. What proof have you of the story he has told you? The son of a nobleman, your old companion-in-arms—forsooth! He's no more that than he's son to the Queen." She laughed mockingly.

"I'll tell you what in my belief he really and truly is. He's none other than a Redemptioner, come from Virginia, where he was bondman, a slave who toiled in the tobacco fields. No doubt he has broken his bond to come hither."

A runaway slave! Could I believe my own ears? The woman who had crept into my heart with a love that was entwined about its every tendril, was accusing me of this! I could only stand and stare helplessly.

Langdon was talking to her, but I could not hear what he said. It was the Governor who openly came to my defense.

"But, Mistress Rose," he began, and there was hint of severity in his tone, "this is absurd. The man has about him no indication of ever having been a bondman. Look at his hands, uncalloused by labor; and the poise of his shoulders. No toiling bondman ever carried himself so erect."

"Not all bondmen labor in the fields or at the wharves," she told him. "There are some who are clerks and accountants; and as such keep white hands and shoulders that do not droop."

The Governor knew this to be true, and so did I for that matter.

Sir Nathaniel was greatly disturbed and showed it.

"But this man has told me a straight story as to himself," he pursued; "and until that story has been proved false, I accept him for what he claims to be. You are excused, my dear." This to Mistress Rose, and in gentler tone.

As she left the room, with Langdon's arm still about her, this Rose of many thorns for me took occasion to turn her head and give me a look which plainly showed her thought of me, a thought which naught at present could bring her to relinquish. My Lady's head was held

as high as my heart was low at that moment. Was there any further evidence needed of the hopelessness of my love?

Truly had I taken a tumble out of Fool's Paradise, a heavy fall. Would I ever dare the attempt to climb back again?

As I took my way to bed, the thought that kept constantly rising above all others was that of the odd behavior of Langdon, the queer change that had come into his countenance when he had stopped short to exclaim, "Nay, I cannot fight with you!"

Even now, after reflecting much upon it, I could not shape it in my mind as an insult, an intended offense. His behavior had not borne this out.

Neither Mistress Rose nor Langdon was at the breakfast table the next morning, absence for which I was duly thankful. I learned later that Langdon had gone away a little after daybreak to his plantation, Oak Lands, which lay some five or six miles beyond Silk Hope. This estate was little less than a barony in size; and he lived there in princely style with a company of servants to do his will and other slaves who toiled in the fields. Truly it paid to be a freebooter of the seas, overhauling craft with rich cargo and fleecing men's pockets. One hot thought kept constant company with me. In what way could I manage to force him to give up the papers of which he had robbed me? The papers that would prove me no villainous adventurer but the man I claimed to be?

There was a new face at the breakfast table the next morning. An inmate of Silk Hope at that time was the Rev. Samuel Thomas, newly come from England to be a missioner to the red men. The priest had a lean, wan face with a somewhat prominent nose. I thought the face cold until I saw the warmth of his soul shining

through his eyes. The one fervid desire of this truly godlike man was to give the Gospel to the Indians. But, as, owing to the threatening attitude of the tribes at the time, he was unable to reach but a sparse few of them, he was acting as chaplain at Silk Hope and also officiating at Pompion Hill, where had been built the first chapel of the English Church outside of Charles Town.

So great was the devotion of this zealous priest to the cause in which he had come, he had insisted, despite the warnings that had been received, on being allowed to proceed into the hostile territory, but had been restrained.

At morning prayers I became conscious that he was not following closely the lines of the Prayer Book, but was praying fervently for all men everywhere of whatever creed or color; especially for the savage red men in whom his whole heart was wrapped up. It was a service of simplicity and earnestness that I was not soon to forget; and as the days went on, I had further reason to regard the priest as a man of humble but fervid faith; one whose heart was warm with the love of his fellow men.

CHAPTER XII

I LEARN OF A WONDERFUL LITTLE SPINNER

I HAD promised the Governor in Charles Town that I would write at once to my father for the purpose of securing new papers, but had delayed. Why had I done so? Knowing well my father's opinion of me, I dreaded to have him know I had failed in my trust at the very outset. How could I satisfactorily account for my carelessness? I could at least during the voyage have kept the papers concealed, where piratical robber could not have come on them. But, as I thought it over, the query kept rising, what possible use could that black-hearted villain have had for that packet of letters? He had taken them merely to torment me, noting how I valued them. What had he done with them? He might have pitched them into the sea, for aught I knew to the contrary. 'Twas likely that such was the case.

Many times I had felt the urge to face him with demand for them. But I was certain that if he had them, he would but taunt me with their possession; and if he had them not, 'twere folly to so proceed.

As the days passed I learned more and more of the many interests, of the vast holdings of the Governor here in the Carolina Province. It was of a truth a princely estate. There were thousands of acres in the tract; some of it on the streams, where there were the choicest of grazing lands for the rearing of cattle. Hundreds of heads roamed here, fattening upon the grasses and the tender shoots of the cane. Other portions of the estate contained forests of the noble pines that produced tar, pitch, turpentine and lumber; and others again were

the moist swamp lands so well adapted to the growing of rice. Both lumber and rice mills, too, the Governor owned; there were hundreds of the black slaves to till the fields; and there was the silk industry, foremost of all at present in the Governor's thoughts. This was his hobby, and he rode it hard.

He had early told me that he wished me to familiarize myself especially with this one of the plantation's many interests. So, this morning I had started out for a round of the sheds and buildings, where the various processes relating to the silk culture were carried on.

It was a jocund morning; all Nature bright and smiling; the sun lavish with its gold. Pools of it glimmered upon the greensward. It seemed to me there were birds in every tree and each one a-lilting at the top of his voice. Squirrels leapt from limb to limb. There was the tap-tap of a woodpecker, tearing the bark from a tree. From the gardens came the many sweet odors that proclaimed the approach of summer. Joy was abroad in the land, and I felt my heart atune with it. I began to whistle my favorite air, "When the King Comes into His Own Again." Would I too, come into my own, and in good time? I would entertain no doubt of it on this glorious morning.

In the mulberry grove a score of the pickaninnies, as the little Africans were called, were busy, gathering the leaves with which to feed the worms.

What I learned that morning of the many wonders performed by the silk caterpillar ere its short span of life was completed did greatly astonish me. One moth, it was told me, usually laid three to four hundred eggs in a season; and so infinitesimally small were they, it required a hundred or more to weigh a grain. Carefully arranged nests were prepared for the moths.

In the house, where the hatching process was going

on, there were squirming masses of the tiny black worms, no thicker than the hair of a horse's tail, that were newly come from the eggs. These had been placed on trays and other receptacles, and were being fed the finely chopped mulberry leaves.

I was amazed to learn that in the first three to four days of its life one of these wriggling hair-like creatures could devour more than a hundred times its weight in the finely shredded mulberry leaves. At first they had to be fed every hour, but as they grew older, the number of meals was decreased day by day till, when their full growth was attained, it required only three or four meals.

As I stood intently regarding one of these squirming masses of thread-like atoms ravenously devouring the finely shredded leaves, a voice, deep and musical, accosted me, "And are you learning of the silkworms, Master Ashton?"

Somewhat startled by the suddenness and nearness of the voice, I turned to behold Mistress Alecia Hastings quizzically regarding me.

"Yes, Mistress, and I have already acquired much knowledge."

"But Gr'a' mercy, sir!" she twitted me, "you are barely at the beginning." Then, an arch look coming into her eyes, she queried: "Shall I further instruct you?"

"If you so please, Mistress, and if 'twill not be of too much trouble."

" 'Tis naught of trouble, I assure you. I love the business. I have learned much of it, for 'tis Sir Nathaniel's wish that I do; and 'tis pleasure to talk of it."

"Even to woodenhead like myself, Mistress?"

" 'Tis not in man's way to admit such," she turned to tell me, with an arch glance, and then all at once

with a suddenness that did straightway confuse me, I noted how very beautiful were her eyes, of a warm and bonnie brown.

"But I am woodenhead, Mistress," I told her, all but stammering, "because of my very great ignorance on the subject; but I would learn," I added humbly.

"Then over this way, sir. Here," she continued, "on these shelves are some of the larva in their varying stages of sleep.

"It is odd, but 'tis nevertheless true," she continued, "that ere they obtain to their full growth the silk caterpillars have sleeping, or molting periods, during which they change their old skins for new ones. 'Tis most interesting to watch them. There are four of these sleeping periods; and, awaking from the last of these, which generally occurs when the worm is twenty-three to twenty-four days old, it has then its final skin, but not its complete growth. A month or more must pass ere that occurs and the spinner is ready to begin its toil."

As she continued to enlighten me, I grew more and more surprised by the manner of the maid this morning. Here was an altogether different Mistress Alecia Hastings from any I had yet discovered. There was not only dignity, but gentleness in her manner, and a sweet wholesomeness that did set well upon her. And I could but note also that here, too, was a maid who could lay claim to both loveliness of face and grace of form. Blind as a bat must I have been not to have before so discovered.

She had taken me now to show me where the full-grown worms were engaged in their spinning. These, as I soon noted, were of a deep amber color, an inch and a half to two inches in length, and about the thickness of the size of the first joint of my little finger.

The spinners had been placed on bunches of straw or on twigs matted together, to which they had attached themselves. Some were in the midst of the spinning; others had completed their work, and the finished cocoons were clustered about on the straw and among the twigs.

I noted how the spinners at their toil had erected themselves in an almost perpendicular position, and were moving their heads from side to side, and as they spun they were gradually enveloping themselves in the silken meshes.

"The spinning," said Mistress Alecia, whom I was finding it hard to realize was the same Mistress Alecia, "is done by means of the glands that extend along each side of the caterpillar and that end of the hole in the head of the worm, the mouth, from which the silk comes. Is it not wonderful?"

As she thus queried she glanced up, and again I had such a look from the brown eyes as did give me a quickening of the heart-beats that was most unaccountable.

"Of a truth, Mistress, it is," I replied; "but I wait to learn more."

"There is much more," she assured me.

"The substance that makes the silk," she continued, "while it is in the body of the worm is soft like jelly, but when it comes from the mouth of the spinner and in contact with the air it hardens."

Now most assuredly was she talking like a sage, as one having a very fine manner of speech, and more and more amazed did I become, for I had held her light-brained as well as madcap.

I was guilty of the bad manners of turning to stare hard at her, for truly was I in a maze of wonder. It was at that very moment she chose to glance at me direct. As her eyes met mine, they quickly drooped and

a flush stole into her cheeks. How rude she must think me, yet could I find no words in which to stammer out an apology.

"If you will bend nearer," she said as though to cloak her embarrassment, "you will hear the whispering sound the spinners make. When that ceases we know that their work is done and the cocoon is complete. Just there you can hear it plainly."

She lifted her finger to point out the spot and, as I bent my head, it was at that moment I felt her sleeve brush my cheek. As I caught its faint delicate perfume, again I experienced that odd behavior of the heart that was indeed most puzzling.

"When the cocoon is completed," she was telling me again, "then is the spinner shut up hard and fast within its silken house."

We went next into the room where the cocoons were being dipped in vessels of boiling water, then placed to dry preparatory to the unwinding. Some of the cocoons had been left undisturbed on the straw and amid the twigs; and thus shut up within its silken abode, the caterpillar changed into a moth, and, emerging, was ready again for its work.

Mistress Alecia picked up one of the dried cocoons and held it toward me.

"Isn't it even more than just wonderful," she queried, "that in this tiny fluffy mass of silken texture there are three thousand yards, and mayhap more, of the fiber?"

It was wonderful; so much so 'twas almost beyond belief; yet, as I learned further that morning, there were cocoons that had been found from which had been unwound close to four thousand yards.

The rooms in which the cocoons were being unwound and in which the spinning, reeling and weaving were

going on each presented a busy scene. Scores of the black people were employed, principally women and children, while here and there, set over the others, was a white workman. Mistress Alec had more and more of most interesting things to tell me of it all.

'Twas in the loom room that I was shown the pattern of the gown that was being woven for the Queen, and 'twas of a most handsome appearance.

"Few are permitted to look on it, much less to handle it now, ere the weaving is completed, and you are most fortunate," Mistress Alec reminded me. " 'Twould fair break Sir Nathaniel's heart should aught of injury befall it; and 'twill be the proudest moment of his life when 'tis off the loom, perfect as he would have it."

We had come outside the building and stood beside the path that led away into the plantation. 'Twas time for me to go, and I knew it; but I made excuse to linger. Our talk now was all about the Queen, of the troublous times that were marking her reign; of the wars abroad as well as those at home; the clashing of the Whigs and Tories.

"She will have no thought, I fear, to give to the affairs in this far-away land," I remarked.

"If 'tis to the Church Acts you refer," spoke Mistress Alecia quickly, "she will do away with that abomination; you will see. Despite all that has been said against her, the Queen is woman as well as sovereign. She will see the rank injustice of it; the placing of a yoke upon freemen as though they were no better than cattle."

"But if the Queen does away with the enactment, as you seem to think, Mistress," I ventured, "will not matters then be worse than at present? Will not the Churchmen themselves be in revolt?"

"Gr'a' mercy! sir, how could matters be any worse than they are at present? Hearken you to this: If that

injustice done the freemen of this Colony by the act of the Churchmen is not removed and speedily, there will be an uprising, a war such as it makes me shudder even to think on. Mercy of God!" she continued; and now a fire leapt into the brown eyes that I was thankful was not there for me. "To take the right of personal liberty from a man is to lower him to the level of the ox and the sheep; and what man of spirit, I ask you, sir, will submit to it?"

She was thinking now, I was sure, of her Non-Conformist Huguenot lover. I had not yet seen him; but then and there I took a strong dislike to him. Who was he anyhow to dare aspire to a maid like this?

What reply I would have made to her question, I know not, for at that moment there came a sharp interruption. There was a whine, a yelp of joy, and a small hairy body, hurling itself through the air, leapt upon me, and sought frantically to reach my face with its moist, lolling tongue. 'Twas my little Cupid, whom I had not seen since the day before.

As I released him after fondling him, he at once threw himself upon Mistress Alec with a like show of joy at having found her. This did much surprise me, as the little beast was not alert to make friends. Too much abuse had been bestowed upon him.

"He seems to know you, Mistress," I said, voicing my surprise; "and not only that but to have a fondness for you."

She looked up quickly from her stroking of the dog to reply, "Yes, your little Cupid and I have already made friends. I—I have twice had him here with me at the silk house."

As she so spoke, for some reason she turned her head aside, and I could see the flush that crept up from her cheek to where the soft hair clustered in little ringlets

against the white temple. Truly was the maid of a most engaging manner this morning.

"I ought to have told you," she began, speaking somewhat abruptly, "that the Chinese were the first to discover the value of the silk caterpillar. 'Twas the Empress Si-Ling-Chi, wife of the Emperor, Ho-Ang-Ti, who so found out. She was both an adoring and a dutiful wife, constantly seeking to devise ways to interest and amuse her husband.

"One morning, a thousand years and more ago, as she went into her garden attended by her maids, she noticed there, feeding upon the leaves of the mulberry trees, a number of worms. Being of an enquiring turn of mind, Si-Ling-Chi paused under one of the trees and began closely to observe the moving objects among the leaves. Not all were feeding; neither were all caterpillars, for some had become moths, and here and there, glued to the leaves, were clusters of tiny eggs each no larger than a mustard seed, and all shining as though newly coated with varnish. She noticed too that some of the caterpillars were engaged in spinning a soft silken web that glistened in the sunlight.

"Most of all Si-Ling-Chi was attracted by those glistening silky webs. She believed they could be drawn out, spun into tiny threads, and woven into cloth. She determined to try and see if it could be done. So, she had her maids gather a number of the worms; and so anxious was she to succeed, she fed and cared for the worms herself. In time her patience and industry had their reward. She discovered how to reel the silk and weave it to be made into garments. And to her is given the additional credit of the invention of the loom. The Chinese were so proud of her achievement they bestowed upon her the title of The Goddess of the Silkworm, and so she is known to-day in Chinese history.

"But proudest of all was Si-Ling-Chi of the praise bestowed by her husband; for the main goal toward which she had worked had been the making for him of a beautiful garment of silk. 'Tis the way of women the world over," commented Mistress Alecia softly, "to strive for the pleasure and the happiness of him whom they truly love."

"Nay, Mistress," I contradicted, " 'tis more their way to strive for that with which they can torment him."

"You speak as though you had been scorched," she told me, giving me a look that was half query, half intuition. "Nay," she added forcefully, " 'tis no true woman who would so act, especially where loyally she loved."

"But you must admit, Mistress, that there have been, and are still, women who, professing to love loyally, have made wrecks of men's lives."

"And what sort of men were they," she flashed at me, "to have lost their manhood from such a cause? Gr'a' mercy! sir, 'tis a weak man who will let any woman, be she ever so ardently loved, make a wilderness of the garden of his soul."

A silence fell between us. I was thinking deeply, and so, too, was she to every appearance. All about us the day glowed like cloth of gold, ashine and asparkle. From the negro quarters came a burst of song, and a mockbird piped from a near-by bough. Beyond the mulberry grove the tall pines rose, beautiful, stately, and mysterious. 'Twas a day never to be forgot, when all Nature was at its loveliest.

As though she shared my thoughts, the maid looked up suddenly to exclaim:

"Oh, how beautiful, how very beautiful is the world to-day! and how happy we ought to be in it."

'Twas a sweet, rapt face she lifted to me at that

moment, with the sunlight rippling over the brown head, and a tender, wistful look ashine in her eyes.

"Happiness?" I echoed. "Nay, Mistress; happiness is a myth that doth elude him who seeks it."

"And I contradict you to say, Master Ashton, that happiness is a boon that is for everyone who doth truly search for it." Then advancing a step toward me, she dropped me a courtesy, saying, "I bid you good-morning, sir."

"Your servant, Mistress," I replied, bowing in turn.

"Come, Cupid!" but to my amazement, the little rascal did not stir.

A laugh, as sweet and silvery as that which I had heard on the water, greeted my ears.

"Cupid, as you see, elects to remain with me, Master Ashton," she told me mischievously.

And so, beyond a doubt, had the traitorous little scamp chosen; for, though I continued to urge him, no heed whatever did he pay to me. There was even a sardonic look in his twinkling eyes, as he deliberately turned to follow Mistress Alec into the silk house. Cupid, too! Was it possible? Cupid, the adoring, the loyal, Cupid, whom I had rashly believed no other voice could ever entice from me, Cupid had deserted me! At the beck of a white hand, at the cooing sound of an alluring voice, Cupid had gone over to another!

What could be in the air this morning to have so changed things? Had all the world gone topsy-turvy and I along with it? And here was I now, seated on a bench beneath one of the majestic oaks, and dreaming, brooding, not over the proud poise of a queenly head, but of the wonder there had been for me in a pair of brown eyes; of that mysterious quickening of the heart their glances had given me.

"Oh, Master Ashton," a sweet, high voice reproached

me; "twice have I spoken to you, and still have you not heeded. What troubles you so this morning you take no notice?"

"What troubles me, little Mistress?" I replied, for now I saw 'twas the small maid, Affra Hastings, sister to Mistress Alec, who stood beside me. "Naught whatever, I do assure you. 'Tis only that I am filled with a wonder so great it does mightily disturb me. Come, sit here beside me; I will ask some questions, and mayhap you can answer them for me."

She was a most engaging little maid who loved to chatter, but oft was she of a sweet seriousness that did give her quite a womanly air. Much of wisdom, too, she had beyond her score of years. She had taken quite a liking to me, which I had not been slow to return. And truly was the fondness she had displayed for me like balm to my sore heart.

Now, as she snuggled down beside me it gave me a queer feeling in my breast to note how much her hair was like her sister's; the same softness, the same glow, and with the same tiny ringlets clustering against the white forehead. Drawn was I to reach out my hand and stroke the head nestled against me. Alike, too, were the brown eyes with which she now gazed at me.

"What are the questions you would ask of me, Master Ashton?"

" 'Tis thus, sweetheart, I would query of you: Is the great house standing yonder, with the sunlight flashing upon its window-panes and the green lawns sloping away from it with their mighty trees, the same house, the same lawns, and the same trees on which I looked yesterday?"

"Why, of course, sir, they are." She gazed at me wonderingly.

"And is the crab-apple tree there by the gate and the

syringa against the wall the very same ones that were abloom yestere'en? Are there squirrels leaping among the boughs of the oaks? And is that really a lizard peering at us from the tree trunk?"

"Dear me! Master Ashton, how queerly you are talking! What can be the matter? Is it your head that is troubling you? Oh! oh!" with a sudden sharp note of alarm, "can it be that you do not see well? Oh! Master Ashton, say quickly that it is not that you are going blind!"

I could hear the sudden catch in her throat as she clutched my sleeve.

I hastened to reassure her as I put my arm about her and drew her nearer.

"No! no! nothing so dreadful as that, little Mistress. 'Tis only that something has happened to me this morning of so strange a nature, and that has wrought so great a change for me, it has set me to wondering if the things I see to-day can be the same I looked on yesterday."

It was while I sat thus with my arm around Affra and my head bent down to hers, that Madam Ball came along the path from the house attended by Mistress Rose and Mistress Anne, and with a maid carrying a basket walking back of them.

The two young ladies passed on with heads in the air, as though they had not seen me, which I was sure they had; but Madam halted to hail me with:

"Lack-a-day! sir, canst find no maid of larger growth to fondle that you must sit there mooning with a nursling?"

"Madam," I replied as I stood to bow to her, "I do assure you that there is none that can please me so well as what I have at present."

"La! La! 'tis no red-blooded man who so speaks. Me-

thinks, sir, 'tis the sting of the thorns that has sent you to mooning in corners with kidlings. For shame! You are a comely rascal and should take well with the ladies. Receive gracefully this bit of advice from an old woman who wishes you well. Quit striving for the apple that hangs above your reach and pluck the fig that is ready to fall into your bosom."

With this she turned and passed on, still cackling as though she had said something that did mightily amuse her.

"They are going to the silk house to see the gown that is being woven for the Queen," said Affra. "And, to judge by the basket the maid carries, they will go, too, to visit old Judith." Then she lifted her head quickly to query, "Have you yet seen old Judith, Master Ashton?"

"Nay, I have not so done," I told her.

"Then you should. She is 'most a hundred years old and knows so many things. She can tell you what is going to happen just the same as if it had already happened. Oh, it frightens me, so to hear her, makes my heart come right up into my throat! She knows, too, why bad luck comes to people, and she can give you charms to keep it away.

"Once, when so many of the plantation cows went dry," Affra hurried on almost breathless, "she said it was because someone had been killing the frogs; and she told Sir Nathaniel that if he would cut hairs from the cows' tails, make little bunches of them, tie them to sprigs of cedar and throw them into the pond where the frogs live, the cows would get their milk back. And they did!" Her voice rose in a little excited squeak.

"And did Sir Nathaniel make little bunches of the cows' hairs, and do as old Judith had told him?"

"We don't know; for when we asked him, he only

smiled at us. Oh, Master Ashton, you should go and get old Judith to tell your fortune," she broke off. "She will know just what it is going to be."

"One of mishap and misfortune, I am sure, my sweet, without the foreknowledge of old Judith to tell me."

"You should not talk so. You are just like Alec. She laughs at what Judith says is to be her fortune, though it is such a fine one; that Alec will marry a title and be ever so grand a lady, and that she will not live here but over the seas. But Alec just laughs and laughs at the idea, and says that Judith knows no more about it than she does, not as much. But I tell you she does; Judith does know things.

"She told me it was bad luck if you heard a screech-owl's cry in the night; but that if you would place your shoes with the soles upward when you were going to bed, there would no bad luck happen to you. And Master Ashton, I have many times heard the screech-owls in the night, and I have each time done as old Judith told me, and there has been no bad luck yet to happen to me."

"And I pray there never will be, sweetheart," I told her as I fondled the bright head.

"Oh, isn't Madam Ball just dreadful!" she suddenly exclaimed. "She calls me brat and minx, and pert moppet, and ever so much more. She does not like either Alec or me, and I think it was because she did not like our mother. 'Tis said her son, Master Archibald Ball, loved our mother and wanted to marry her. But she loved our father best. It broke Master Archibald's heart. He went away to the Indian war and was killed. So Madam blamed our mother.

" 'Tis a shame," continued Affra, now plainly showing her ire, "the way Madam sometimes speaks to Alec. And I've heard her, too, talking to Sir Nathaniel about

Alec. Oh, Master Ashton! Alec does not deserve it, for she is just as sweet and lovely as can be, the best and dearest of sisters. She is so patient with me, and does not snap at me and tell me that I am a pest, a froward minx as do Madam and Mistress Rose. Oh, she is the sweetest and loveliest of sisters! I just can't love her enough. And you would love her, too, if you knew her well."

Now was the little maid looking up into my face with the most ingenuous smile, and the words she had just spoken set my heart to behaving in the most unaccountable fashion.

"Madam never speaks to Mistress Rose in that manner," continued Affra. "Truth to tell, Mistress Rose would not take it. She has a tongue of her own and she uses it freely on all, on everyone except Master Langdon. For him she is all smiles and soft speech. And oh, Master Ashton, he is a dreadful man; I know that he is! He fair frightens me at times."

The words swiftly aroused me from a reverie into which I was fast falling.

"Why, Affra, sweet," I hurriedly questioned, "what makes you speak thus of Master Langdon?"

"Because 'tis so I feel toward him. Perhaps it is that he can't help being wicked," she added generously. " 'Tis said there is an ogre that lives in the castle with him, that comes and goes, a big, black, dreadful ogre. And when the ogre is at the castle Master Langdon is bad, oh, so bad! But when the ogre goes away, Master Langdon gets good again. One time he came to see Mistress Rose when the ogre was at the castle; and oh, he was so wicked, so awful wicked, he made her cry and cry."

I wondered whence the little maid could have gotten such fancy concerning Langdon. Then suddenly I re-

called certain words I had overheard Sir Nathaniel speaking to Sir Christopher.

"Langdon!" he had exclaimed. "Well, there you have a man of strange moods, who now and again doth greatly surprise and perplex me. Once, I recall, after a long absence, he was so changed physically, mentally, and in every way, I scarce knew him. He had been desperately ill, he told me."

I thought I knew well enough what had caused the change. He had no doubt met with rough experience on one of his piratical cruises.

Affra's voice again called me back from my wanderings in the land of speculation.

"What nice hair you have, Master Ashton," she was saying as she wound a strand of it about her fingers; "and I know that Alec thinks so, too," she added naively. "Alec does not like the perukes," she continued. "She says that the hair of many of them came from the heads of dead people, from the heads of some who have died of diseases. Oh, it makes me shudder just to think of it!"

I shuddered too. It was a horrible thought that had not before come to me. More than ever now would I be set against the fashion.

"And I like you, too, because you are tall," my little sweetheart was saying again. "When I marry," she went on with a sweet seriousness that was most engaging, "it will be a man tall like you, with eyes that look straight at one with a glance that can be both soft and merry; and he must have dark locks all his own, and that curl just like yours do."

"Then why not marry me, sweet?" I bantered; "and not go further, looking for one who is tall and with curling dark locks?"

"Oh, are you in earnest, and will you wait for me?"

"That I will most gladly," and I gave her a kiss to seal the compact.

"Oh, now is my marriage all settled for me," said she with a sigh of contentment; "and I shall not have to go searching for a husband as do the maidens of this Province."

At this I had to laugh and to give her another kiss full upon the sweet upturned mouth that would give such joy to some man in the future, and deep within my heart rose the prayer that it would be the right man.

She seemed musing for a moment then looked up quickly to say, " 'Tis all settled for Alec, too; and she does not have to go searching for a husband. She never did have to go searching for one. 'Twas Monsieur St. Julien who came looking for her, and he is that mad in love with her, he just can't wait but keeps urging her all the time to say when she will marry him."

Now more than ever did I want to get a look at this Monsieur St. Julien, and still more convinced I was that I was not going to like him.

CHAPTER XIII

SILK HOPE HAS A SEASON OF MERRYMAKING

I WAS learning more and more of the somewhat singular forms of government by which the affairs of the Province were conducted.

Some forty odd years before my arrival, King Charles II had bestowed upon eight of his favorite courtiers the grant to an extensive tract of land lying along the Atlantic coast, between Virginia on the north and Florida on the south. This tract had been called in honor of the King, Carolina. There were those, however, who told me that the name had been given a full century before by a band of Huguenot refugees, who had settled for a time at a point farther to the south, known as Port Royal, and that the country had been called for their sovereign, King Charles IX of France.

The eight favorites of King Charles of England upon whom the grant to the land had been bestowed were Lord Ashley Cooper, the Earl of Clarendon, Sir John Colleton, Sir William Berkeley, Lord Berkeley, the Duke of Albemarle, Lord Craven, and Sir George Carteret.

At the time of the grant the tract designated was not entirely unsettled. Several Non-Conformist families had moved southward from the Virginia colony a score or more of years before, and had settled in the northern portion of the country. So, too, had a company of Puritans from the far-away settlements known as New England.

Some seven years or so following the issuing of the Charter to the royal favorites, who had become known as the Lords Proprietors, the first settlement in the southern portion of the Province had been made by English emi-

grants and in the vicinity of the present site of Charles Town. Two years later the town itself had been founded.

In the matter of the preparation of a system of laws whereby the new Province was to be governed, the Proprietors had called to their aid the brain of John Locke, then the foremost man of learning in the Mother Land. The result had been the document known as Locke's Grand Model, or as the Proprietors themselves termed it, The Fundamental Constitution of the Province of Carolina.

Under the rulings of the Grand Model, the Province had been constituted a County Palatinate; its official head being known as The Palatine. Provision was made to the effect that on the death of the Palatine the office was to descend, in turn, to the oldest of the Proprietors.

The Palatine together with the seven other Proprietors constituted the Palatine Court. This body possessed all power of authority next that of the King. In addition various other courts had been created. Controlling these courts was the Grand Council, consisting of the Palatine, the seven other Proprietors, and forty-two counsellors selected from the different Proprietors' Courts.

In the Grand Council was invested the power to settle all controversies arising between the various Proprietors' Courts with reference to their respective jurisdictions. The Grand Council also had in hand the preparation of all matters to be presented to Parliament from the Province; and no matter was allowed to go up to Parliament from the Province that did not first pass through the hands of the Grand Council.

Intrusted with the execution of the laws in the Province were the Governor, the Governor's Council, the Colonial Parliament, and certain courts corresponding to those of the English laws.

I had also learned of the three orders of the patented nobility of the Province, provided for in the Grand Model. The titles thus bestowed were those of Landgrave, Cassique, and Baron. These titles could pass from one to another by purchase as well as by inheritance. To purchase the title of Baron a man had to be the possessor of twelve thousand acres of land; to obtain that of Cassique, twenty-four thousand acres; and to obtain to the highest title of all, that of Landgrave, forty-eight thousand acres. The bestowing of these titles was in the hands of the Proprietors. No matter of what birth a man might be, he had only to become the owner of the required amount of land, which was sold to such aspirants at a penny the acre, to entitle him to the coveted honor.

I fully understood now Major Popple's contempt for the Penny Barons; the anathemas he hurled at them for their pompous assumption of the rights of the titled gentry to direct the affairs of the Colony.

Not only was the bestowing of these titles within the authority of the Proprietors, but they also had the power of issuing land grants. Thus there were favorites who had obtained titles without having to wait to secure by purchase the necessary number of acres.

'Twas a system of rank favoritism, of sheer injustice as I was beginning to see. I had met with so little justice in life myself, it was not hard for me to feel sympathy for those in like condition. God, as I devoutly believed, had intended happiness for every man. Some missed it through their own blindness and folly; while to others, like myself, it came not, because of the harshness and cruelty of others. I, who had gone hungering for it all my life, could well condone its loss to others.

As I had been informed, the commonalty composed fully two-thirds of the people of the Colony; and many

of them were men of fine principles and of marked industry. Yet for the happiness and welfare of this class there had been no provision made. Instead about their necks had been placed the yoke of servitude. Every right or privilege granted them depended upon the will of the autocracy. No wonder that the fire of revolt was smouldering in their breasts, ready to leap into flame at any moment; no wonder they felt only hatred for a system of laws made solely for the prosperity of the favored few. For clearly had the Grand Model been written with the view to place the iron hand of restriction upon any growing strength of the commonalty.

It was no new thing for me to be espousing the cause of justice for those whom it had been the will of Providence to place in the lower walks of life. It was rank tyranny, as I had always contended, to hold against a man the matter of his birth. For to which one of all the many millions who had come into the world had the privilege been given of choosing his own ancestors?

I had had the courage more than once to express these views to my father, whereupon he had twitted me for my plebeian leanings, with the added sting of the declaration that I ought to have had origin in the common ranks. Of a truth, he would have been rejoiced had I never been born at all.

Thus, from what I had both seen and heard since my coming into the Goose Creek neighborhood, it was being borne into my understanding that the Anglo-Saxon spirit of personal right and of antagonism toward wrong and injustice was too keenly alive in the breasts of the freemen of the Carolina Province for them to long remain submissive. The passage of the Church Acts, a blow directed at their freedom of conscience, had been the goad to fully arouse them.

I, although a newcomer to the Province, could plainly see the gathering clouds of the storm that was soon to break over the land.

Yet I could feel no strong condemnation of the Governor. Rather did I pity him. He was in a hard position; for, as was well known, he had but acted at the urge of Lord Granville, his superior in authority. And although he was now warmly, even hotly defending the enactments, and was grimly determined on upholding them, I was of the opinion that it was more from loyalty to Granville and the Church than from any firm conviction of his own on the subject. He must be seeing by this time both the folly and rashness of the passage of laws that brought the entire Province to the verge of civil war.

'Twas full three days till the night of the Governor's ball, but already preparations had been begun, and upon a great scale. These proceedings I watched with the liveliest interest. Within my remembrance there had been little of merrymaking in my English home; no feasts or jousts; but few dinings, and only the one ball when my brother had come of age. My mother's death had made of my father a sorrowful man, who took no part in the pastimes of the world.

I was astonished to see with what ease and understanding the black creatures, with which the plantation swarmed, did their various tasks. 'Twas all due to careful training, as was very plain.

Already much of the great house had been set in order. Carpets and rugs had been removed, beaten, rolled up, and placed aside for the time. The furniture had been polished till it shone like the face of a mirror; and the floor of the ballroom waxed and made ready for the feet of the dancers.

Another host of the black menials was busy in the kitchen with pans and pots and rolling-pins, basting-ladles, and turnspits.

Though given by the Governor, the function was to be devoid of all official significance. The Governor himself had announced that he would disregard all formalities. The entire neighborhood was invited, while many would come from the Town.

The auspicious evening had arrived. The house was ablaze with lights. They shone from every window and open doorway. Everything within had a festive air. Myriads of wax candles in many-branched candelabra cast their mellow glow from wall and mantelpiece, while numerous others in gilded chandeliers threw out wide circles of light. Garlands of flowers were draped about the mantels, and vases of china and amber-tinted glass held clusters of the fragrant blossoms.

On the lawns a number of bonfires had been kindled, for the purpose of lighting the path of the guests from the landing and from the gates opening upon the highway. Black men were in attendance to take charge of the horses.

From outside the ballroom I watched for a time the festive scene. The musicians were all black men; but Master Nicholas Brawn, the dancing master of the Town, was there to direct the dances, and to teach the steps to those who were novices.

The Governor and his lady had opened the ball with a minuet danced in stately fashion; and I was surprised to note how fair was the music made by the African fiddlers, how perfectly in time with the steps. I had never thought that these black creatures could be taught such accomplishment. Violins, violin-cellos, and flutes, they were masters of all; for now and again one musician

would change instrument with another of the players, with no break in the harmony.

From the brilliantly lighted room came a ring of joyous laughter, snatches of gay talk, words of banter, and deeper, mellower words of some bold, love-making swain.

Langdon, as usual, was in attendance upon Mistress Rose. He seemed loth to leave her, even to make way for another claimant of the honor of a dance.

My Lady was transcendently beautiful this evening; her face aglow like a flower in the sun; her eyes shining with the light of stars. But somehow her beauty, her radiance, the lilt of her laughter did not awaken within me those sweet, tormenting thrills that I had heretofore experienced. I could not forget her coldness, her cruelty, the sting of her tongue as she had so shamelessly accused me to the Governor. Besides, I was more than beginning to realize the folly of enshrining within my heart a woman whose own heart was wholly given to another.

At length, as I stood there feeling chilled and downhearted, despite the gayety all about me, my eyes fell upon Mistress Alecia Hastings and her Huguenot lover, Raoul St. Julien. He was, of course, beside her; and it would have been only a blind man who could not have seen the devotion in his face. He was both handsome of feature and engaging in manner; I had to admit it; a gentleman by every grace, and never had I seen that witch of many moods, Mistress Alecia, so enchanting, with the mellow glow of the candles rippling over her brown hair.

She was all in white with just a cluster of pink roses caught in the lace of her bodice. Pink, too, were her cheeks, whether from the effort of the dance she had just concluded, or from the ardor shining in her lover's

eyes, of course I could not tell. But I experienced an odd sensation of resentment as I stood there observing them.

What right, I wondered, had St. Julien for his cocksure air, his manner of proprietorship? Had she given him the right? And how far had matters between them really advanced?

I was suddenly seized with the impulse to enter the room, hasten to her, and demand that she leave St. Julien, and give me the next dance. Then I went all atremble at the thought of what such rashness and folly would cost me. The flash of her eyes, beyond a doubt, a contemptuous toss of the head; then a change, and following it such words from her glib tongue as would hold me up to the ridicule of the entire room.

It was hard ways truly I had fallen upon in this strange land, where I was little better than an interloper till my father was heard from; or that villain, Langdon, had been brought to account and made to answer for the injury he had done me. There he was now moving about the room, from one fair one to another, with that intolerable smirk upon his face, the nonchalance of manner so well assumed, and with that air of being very much the grand gentleman.

My fingers felt the itch to then and there seize him by the throat and force him into telling me what he had done with the papers of which he had robbed me.

It was at this time that a soft hand stole into mine and a sweet high voice assailed me. I turned about to see beside me the little maid, Affra, with her brown eyes reproachfully regarding me and her finger uplifted as she told me, "You are behaving most shamelessly, sir, for a promised husband, do you know it?"

"I am very well aware of my many shortcomings, sweet Mistress," I replied humbly, and bowing with my

hand upon my heart; "but will you tell me wherein I have failed in this instance?"

"Why, by being naughty, oh, so very, very naughty! You promise to dance with me, and then you hide so that I must hunt and hunt before I find you. Now, why have you done thus?"

"Because, sweetheart, I was sure that there were many finer and handsomer, and younger gentlemen fairly clamoring for the honor of the dance with you."

"Oh, now are you talking foolishly! Of course, there is no one I should want to dance with so much as you, for are we not going to be married?"

"Of a truth, little witch, we are; unless when you grow up you experience a change of heart and shamelessly desert me. This, I fear, is most likely; for truly does it seem I am doomed to be unfortunate in love," I sighed, since there was more of truth than banter in the words.

"I'll never, never be false to you," she told me loyally, and there was a soul of love shining in the bright eyes. "But come, Master Ashton, there is the music about to begin, and this is the dance I love best of all."

So, clasping my hand, she drew me toward the room; but instead of taking me to where the dancers were beginning to assemble, she crossed the room to the corner where her sister and Monsieur St. Julien were in tête-à-tête.

"See, sister," she announced with a proud toss of the head as she drew me forward; "you said he would not dance with a chit like me; but I have him all right."

Mistress Alecia looked up to laugh, a silvery ripple of amusement. At the same time I caught a glance from the brown eyes that set me all aquiver.

"So I see," she said to Affra. "Congratulations, my

sweet. But I have none for you, Master Ashton; for if she releases you after even the third dance, you will be doing well. But 'tis a dear child;" here she gazed fondly at her little sister; "and methinks you will find no hardship in pleasing her." Then: "But let me present you and Monsieur St. Julien to each other."

I feared that I bowed stiffly; for to save me, I could put no show of cordiality in the act. St. Julien, however, on his part, not only inclined his head with an easy grace, but also smiled.

"You are but newly come to the Province, Master Ashton, I understand," he said in English, and with but a slight accent.

I replied that such was the case, and was about to add a word or two more, so as not to appear boorish, when at this point Affra gave a tug at my sleeve, warning me that the dance was close to beginning. Then she turned to her sister and said with a suddenness and a directness that of a truth was most startling:

"When Master Ashton has finished dancing with me, Alec, I will bring him back for a dance with you. You know you said you wondered if he would ask you."

At these amazing words I caught the sound of a gasp of dismay, then a burst of amused laughter from St. Julien. When I dared to look up I saw that Mistress Alecia's cheeks were dyed a deeper red and that her head was turned away.

" If—if you will so honor me, Mistress," I managed to stammer out, and again I heard St. Julien laugh.

"Most certainly, sir, if it is to your pleasure."

As she thus replied to me, Mistress Alec glanced up, and now I saw that she was again the madcap maid I so well remembered. Twinkling lights of merriment were in the brown eyes and the corners of her lips were twitching.

"And thank you kindly, sir," she added demurely as she stood up to drop me a courtesy.

St. Julien was evidently finding much amusement in the situation, for now I heard him begin to banter her. I fear I glared at him; but as I turned away, urged again by Affra, I too began to see the humor of the predicament into which the little witch of a sister had plunged us. And from amusement I went to wondering if to Mistress Alecia there would be aught of the pleasure in the dance there would be for me. She had been truly most gracious, despite her embarrassment. As to myself, my pulse had begun already to quicken at the thought of what the dance was going to mean to me.

It was in one of the pauses of a dance that I came face to face with Langdon. He was smiling sardonically as he addressed me.

"Pippins and cheese!" exclaimed he as though he were greatly astonished at sight of me; " 'tis really you, my bully-rook? And art having a gay time? Well, 'tis wise you are to enjoy yourself while you can. Pleasure is a thing of swift wing; here to-day and gone to-morrow."

Seeing that I had no intention of replying to him, he continued as though to taunt me into words.

"And canst get no better than a kidling with which to trip the measure? Ha! Ha! methinks you are little more than bantling yourself."

"I get that of which I make choice," I told him; and moved aside, lest I make angrier retort. 'Twas no place for encounter with him.

He laughed again, a laugh of devilish enjoyment, and turned to address humorous remark to Mistress Anne Coming, with whom he was dancing.

I felt Affra's quick pressure upon my hand and looked down to see her face upturned and drawn into a frown.

"Don't mind him, Master Ashton," she plead. "Don't let it hurt you one bit what he said. He is a bad, bad man. Madam Ball says he is possessed of a devil. No one likes him but Mistress Rose, and she is fair mad about him. He is bound to break her heart, so Madam believes."

The warm sympathy of the little maid was most soothing to me.

"He cannot harm me, sweetheart, never fear," I told her as I returned the pressure and smiled at her; "no more than he has already done." This last I said to myself.

I threw off my gloom in the pleasures of the dance. I found my little sweetheart a charming partner; and there were the delights of treading the measures with one who knew them so well and of wafting back and forth in the mazes of the dance, clasping first one shapely white hand of fair one and then another as offered to me.

The dancing for the time had ceased. All about me I caught the rustle of silken skirts, the flutter of fans, the murmur of voices in conversation, as the company gathered in social groups. I found my little partner a seat over by one of the windows and was standing beside her when I caught words spoken but a little distance back of me:

"A comely man, you say, and one of most pleasing manner? Bah! I cannot compliment your taste. I've seen ploughmen with handsomer looks and menials with more grace. And who is he, you ask? No one knows anything of him; but 'tis very evident that he is an adventurer come hither for gain. I wonder the Governor tolerates him."

I could not see the speaker, of course: but I knew

well that voice, scornful, uplifted in accusal. 'Twas that of Mistress Rose.

Quickly another voice replied to her, a voice warm with indignation:

"He is no more of an adventurer than you are yourself, Mistress Rose, and well you know it. The Governor is assured of his claim to be the son of an old friend, else would he not be here."

Now was I not so sure. Who could it be so warmly defending me? Then suddenly I realized, and felt my heart glow. 'Twas Mistress Alecia, and no other.

I looked down to see if Affra, too, had overheard, but she had not. She had been too closely engaged with something that had attracted her attention across the room.

"I do believe they are fixing for Alec and Monsieur St. Julien to dance the rigadoon!" she suddenly called out to me. "'Tis the new step that has come from France, and Monsieur has been teaching it to Alec."

There was something out of the usual about to occur, as I soon discovered, something of much interest, to judge by the stir now perceptible throughout the room and the look of expectancy upon the faces. A space was being cleared, and about it the guests were forming in a circle.

"Come quickly," Affra urged of me, "or we shall not get a good place."

We had barely taken our position, when into the ring formed by the circle of spectators came Monsieur St. Julien and Mistress Alecia, hand in hand; he with much dignity but smiling, and she laughing and tossing her head as though this they were about to do was the finest of jokes. The maid was all coquette now, and there were the dancing lights of mischief in the brown eyes.

'Twas a dance of much gayety, with a jumping step

and many lively movements. St. Julien had perforce very shortly to abandon his dignity. No man could have kept it long under the maid's gay raillery. As to Mistress Alecia, she was a very witch of merriment, bantering, challenging, bubbling with laughter, while her high-heeled slippers—newly come from France—kept up a merry clatter.

I wondered if such would be the maid's way when dancing with me; if she would make a merry time of it as she was doing now with St. Julien. But 'twas quite a different Mistress Alecia with whom I moved through the measures of the minuet, a maid all dignity, yet of a sweetly gracious manner as we met and clasped hands in the windings of the dance. There was, too, about her, as I shortly discovered, a bit of an air of shyness that set me to wondering.

There was a new softness, too, that had come into her manner as we stood there beside the open window, chatting after the dance. The bonfires were still brilliantly aflame upon the lawns. In their glow the great oaks stood out stately and majestic; the stretches of sward gleamed like emerald velvet. Unconsciously I sighed. Memories were stirring within me.

"How much does it remind you of your home in England?" a soft voice queried.

I glanced around to see in the lovely uplifted face an interest, an earnestness that quickly unloosed my tongue. Despite that I had not been happy there, I passionately loved my Sussex home. Vividly now it came before me; the wide lawns with their emerald sward, the stately oaks of the park, the ivy-twined towers where the rooks nested; the lake in which the swans and the ducks sported, the fertile fields, the beauty of the rolling hills with their flocks of white sheep. All these I now described with the warmth of the love in my heart on my

lips. And the sweetness, the womanliness in the face uplifted with so intent a look were an inspiration that urged me on.

" 'Tis May-time there, fair Mistress," I said, "as it is here; and methinks that even across the many miles I can smell the hawthorn hedges all abloom, and the pungent scents of woods and fields. To my ear, too, come the sounds dearest to me of all others of the world; the cooing of the doves in the stable-yard, the lowing of the kine, the murmur of the stream that flows through the copse, the stiff winds blowing down from the hills, the calls of the larks and thrushes."

My voice was growing unsteady. I felt myself choking up. The realization of all I had fallen upon here in this strange, hard land, my sick longing at that moment for sight of my home in far-away England, was like stabs of a fierce pain.

A gentle hand fell upon my sleeve; a mere touch it was, but it had a magic that sent a tingling through me.

" But you'll see it all again soon," she said blithely now, and cheering me with a look in the brown eyes that set my heart to faster beat. "You will go back and take to yourself a fair wife to grace that beautiful home."

"Nay, Mistress," I answered her, "the home is not for me or wife of mine. 'Tis all for my brother."

Then, noting the sweet light of earnestness in her face, I was led to pour out my whole story to her of the quest on which I had been sent, of the misfortune that had befallen me on the way, of the difficulties that beset me, of the unpleasantness of the situation in which I was now placed.

"Never despair," said she when I had concluded, and there was a radiance in the smile she gave me now that set my heart to pounding; "you will yet win that for which you have come. Your brother, if alive, will yet

be found. Take heart and go on. My father, who ever had a wholesome view of life and who was of a most gladsome disposition, had for his motto, 'Fear God, and fight for your rights.' If a man do that 'tis God Himself who will put strength into his heart."

CHAPTER XIV

ANXIOUSLY AWAITING THE QUEEN'S DECISION

THE supper was a royal feast; a banquet such as would have tickled a king's palate; turkey, chicken, game of all kinds, fish browned to a delicacy; pastries, cakes and many sorts of jellies, creams and custards. In the center was a tall cake, beautifully iced and adorned, and concealed within it a brooch and a thimble.

At the close of the meal the young ladies would cut the cake. She who found the brooch in her slice would marry rich, and be mistress over a lordly manor. She who received the thimble would be wife to a poor man, and have to work for him all the days of her life. There was many a merry jest, and much bantering as to who would be the unenviable maid to become possessor of the thimble.

There was considerable conversation going on, of a pleasant nature so far. I was glad of this. I had feared another heated discussion of political affairs; for gathered about the table were Sir Christopher Bandy, Sir John Coming, and the same Captain James Cantey and Master Brewton I had previously met. But each seemed disposed, for the time at least, to forget all differences, and to give himself up to the pleasures of the occasion.

The Governor was exerting himself to be the affable and hospitable host. He was elegantly dressed in plum-colored velvet with white satin waistcoat. A carefully curled and powdered peruke fell below his shoulders. But despite his show of good spirits, I could see a shadow now and then flit over his face. He was newly disturbed over something, as I very shortly decided;

perhaps some fresh perplexity in state affairs. I wondered if Captain Cantey, arrived from Charles Town but a few hours agone, could have brought him any ill news. It seemed to me, too, as I noted closely, that both Captain Cantey and Master Brewton, though they were to all appearance entering heartily into the merrymaking, partook at times of the Governor's disturbed state of mind. I felt a chill of fear as the thought struck me that there might have come still more alarming rumors with reference to the threatened Spanish and Indian troubles.

The Governor, however, was all smiles and lightness of mood as he rose to propose the main toast of the evening. "To the Church, the Queen, and the ladies!" said he, holding high the slender, tapering glass in which glowed the amber wine.

"La! La!" clacked out Madam Ball, as we rose, glass in hand, to drink with the Governor, " 'tis no loyal subject you are, Sir Nathaniel, putting your sovereign second."

"Madam," replied the Governor with a fine dignity, "there is no mortal being, even one who is royal sovereign, who should rank above Holy Church," and again he gave the toast in ringing voice.

As we sat down, after draining our glasses, I noted that a deep flush had come into the Governor's face, and that he was greatly perturbed. I understood this as later I learned that the staunchness of the Governor's loyalty to the Crown had been a matter of some question at one time; since he had refused to take the oath of allegiance to William and Mary, and had been deprived of his Governorship of the Leewards in consequence. If he had failed his sovereign one time, would he not do so again if the mood took him? That was the question asked. The Proprietors, it was hinted, did not

fully trust him, and they had been slow to agree on his appointment as Governor of the Carolina Province. All this, when I learned of it, I thought wholly unjust. The Governor was a staunch Royalist, an ardent supporter of the Stuart cause. There was no doubt of that. He had risked everything, life itself—in proof of his loyalty, and Anne was a Stuart. There were thousands of others who, like the Governor, had refused to give allegiance to William the Usurper, as he was known.

The lady's cake had been cut, and much merriment had risen in consequence. Mistress Alecia had become the possessor of the brooch, while to the lot of Mistress Anne Coming had fallen the thimble.

"Lawsie me! How grand, Alecia! Which is it to be," chaffed a fair one, "a duke or a royal prince?"

"And you, Anne," twitted another, "who would ever have thought of you, with your high-and-mighty ways, consigned to a life of drudgery?"

This bantering was good-naturedly taken, and the fun went on. The young gentlemen about the table joined with the maids in the chaffing at the expense of Mistress Anne and Mistress Alecia. Sitting next the latter was St. Julien, taking little part in the merriment, but his face aglow with happiness as, from time to time, his eyes were turned upon the maid beside him. His self-assurance irritated me. To all appearance, he was in no degree concerned with the matter of the grand fortune foretold for her by the cutting of the cake. As was quite evident, there was no wealthy titled lover as a rival in his vision of the future. His cock-sure air awakened my ire. What right had he, I desired to know, to assume such manner of proprietorship?

She was a winsome maid despite her madcap ways; more winsome even than I had yet seen her, as she sat there, replying vivaciously to the bantering, her head

well up, a rosy glow in her cheeks, her eyes all ashine, and with the candle-light kindling into deeper glow, the soft coronal of hair. No wonder St. Julien couldn't keep his eyes away from her. I caught myself staring at her again and again.

The ladies were getting up from the table, to retire. With my gaze upon Mistress Alecia, it suddenly came to me with something of a shock that there was really a regal air about her. Was it the effect of the gown she wore, I wondered; or was she of a truth taller and of a more graceful carriage than I had heretofore discovered? She evidently became conscious of my prolonged gaze, for suddenly she turned and caught me staring full at her. Her eyes fell and a deeper flush crept into her cheeks. Then her shoulders lifted, and as she moved away, I had the uneasy feeling that I had offended her. Truly had I been rude without intending it. I went hot, then cold as I recalled her sweet and kindly manner toward me as I had poured out my story to her, and as on the heels of this came the reflection of what she must be thinking of me now.

As I was passing along a hall from one room to another, with these unpleasant thoughts for company, some one caught and held me with a sharp little squeak of delight.

"Oh, here you are at last!" said Affra, seeking to draw my head down to hers. "I've been watching and watching. I thought you would never come! Kiss me good-night. I am sent to bed. Alecia wanted me to go two hours agone, but I just wouldn't."

Then, as she lingered to press my hand again, she added, "Aren't you going to have another dance with Alecia?"

"I think not, heart of mine; for I fear all the others are to be given to Monsieur St. Julien."

"Then if they are, 'tis because he has coaxed her into giving them to him. Lean down here," said she suddenly, "I've something to tell you. I don't believe Alec cares half as much for Monsieur as he cares for her."

"What makes you say that, little one?"

"Because I think it is true. When one is in love, one is happy. Is not that so?"

"Not always, dear heart. There are times when there is much of unhappiness in love." As I said this, I sighed, for did I not speak from my own experience?

"Oh, but I am sure that were Alec in love she would not be unhappy, but just as gay as could be. Now I can tell that she is not happy; at least at times she is not. 'Tis of late I have noticed it. She has been crying in the night, when she thought I was asleep and did not hear. Once, when I could not endure it another minute and asked her what was the matter, she said she was crying because it was a hard old world in which we lived, for in it things never went right. Now, what do you think she could have meant, Master Ashton?"

"I am sure I don't know, Affra, sweetheart. I wish I did," I added earnestly. "But hard luck just seems to follow some people, myself for one."

"Oh, you must not say that! You must do what Old Judith says, listen for the screech-owl's cry and turn your shoes with the soles up, then no bad luck can come to you. But there is Daphne coming to hurry me to bed. Kiss me again, dear Master Ashton."

As I stood looking after her, I felt my eyes moisten. There was a wonderful softness in my heart for this dear little maid.

The moon had grown pale and was now sunken from sight. Only the stars remained atwinkle in the deep blue vault of the night, and still the merriment went on; but now I had no heart for it. Feeling myself

more than ever a stranger, and alien to the scenes of festivity about me, I left the house and strolled out into the night.

The fires on the lawn had died down; only a faint glow was coming from each one. Long shadows lay across the lawns. Only where the reflection from within shone through the windows were there pools of light. Suddenly I became aware of a form that had stolen from out the gloom beneath a tree and was approaching the house in a somewhat stealthy manner. What guest, I wondered, could be prowling about in this fashion? And what was the meaning of the furtive air with which he was making his way toward one of the windows?

I stood quiet, intently watching, concealed by the shadow of the house. The man was draped in a long cloak, and his hat was pulled down over his eyes. Evidently his purpose was of such a nature he did not want to be recognized. As he neared the window, he apparently lost caution in his desire to peer within.

As he stepped into the bar of light and raised his head, I recognized him, and in my astonishment at the recognition, came near exclaiming aloud. The man was Langdon and never had I seen his face with so black a scowl nor so evil a look.

I was dazed by what the light revealed to me. The man was surely Langdon, but I could have sworn that I had seen him in the ballroom but a few moments agone. What could it mean? What was his object in seeking thus to make furtive inspection of the room, where the merriment was going on, when he could have entered it boldly, nay had been within but a brief space agone? Then I thought I knew. Some demon of jealousy had entered his heart, and he was spying on Mistress Rose.

He stood for some seconds with that fiendish scowl on

his face deepening, then, pulling down his hat again, hunched his shoulders and slunk away. I watched to see which way he would go. It was in the same direction whence he had come. I hurried into the house, and though I searched carefully from room to room, Langdon was nowhere among the merrymakers.

"Langdon 'tis you want?" queried a young man of whom I made question. "Oh, he went away a little time ago. Said he had some hard work on the morrow, and couldn't afford to lose any more sleep."

Now, the more carefully I thought it over the less was I inclined to hold to the belief that Langdon had been spying upon Mistress Rose. That devilish scowl, the look of evil that had so disfigured his face had a deeper meaning. As I again recalled the scene I had witnessed in the forest, it was with a feeling of grim foreboding. That the arch-plotter was deep in some scheme of villainy, I was certain; and that grave peril threatened those who were wholly unconscious of this man's treachery, I was also confident. What was I to do? I had before tried earnestly to unmask the scoundrel, but of what avail? The effort had merely ended by bringing discredit upon myself. Yet despite this I would again warn the Governor. On this I was fully resolved. I would now wait, however, till the morrow.

Sir Nathaniel was in his private room off the library, and with him a favored few of his guests. They were gathered about a great bowl of punch and another of apple-toddy. Pipes and tobacco were in evidence, and as I entered the room my vision was for the moment somewhat blurred by the fog of smoke. Yet this was no light-hearted party of merrymakers upon which I had come. It took me but a few moments to thus discover. There was a look of gravity upon each face, even upon that of young Anthony Coming, son of Sir John.

It was Captain Cantey who was speaking as I entered.

"I fear it is true," he said, "the rumor seems to be well founded. Boone, it is claimed, has succeeded in reaching the ear of the Queen, and there is a belief abroad that she will side with the Non-Conformists and have the Church Acts annulled."

"I cannot believe that," said the Governor quietly; "the Queen is too staunch a Church woman."

"By God, sir!" blazed out Sir Christopher Bandy, "if the Queen does a thing like that, espouses the cause of the common herd against that of gentlemen, she is no longer sovereign of mine!"

"That is treason, sir!" said the Governor sternly. "Take warning, and choose your words with more wisdom."

"If that be treason," replied Sir Christopher stubbornly, "I let it stand as such. Cart me off to gaol, if you are so disposed, but I'll stick to my opinion whatever comes. Anne's a weak woman if she lets herself be turned to the cause of these firebrand Dissenters."

"You are most indiscreet, sir," Captain Cantey also rebuked him. "Not only are they treasonable, but your words are calculated to do harm. A bad example it is, let me remind you, especially for the two young gentlemen who are present, whose loyalty may be weakened by it." He nodded as he spoke toward Anthony Coming and young Giles Brewton.

Up sprang Anthony, his handsome face flushed, his eyes glowing, his hand uplifted as though in salute.

"I assure you, sir," his voice ringing out, "that naught anyone can say can in any degree lessen my allegiance to my Queen. She is my sovereign through everything."

"Good boy!" commended his father, his eyes shining with love and pride.

"I join Anthony in every word of that," said young Giles, also standing to make obeisance.

But Sir Christopher, who was in a quarrelsome mood —no doubt the liquors were having their effect—was not disposed to let the matter drop. He turned upon the Governor. "All this would have been different if you had shown the proper mien in the matter, exercised your authority as you should have done."

"Deuce take it, man!" interposed Master Brewton, "are you determined to woo trouble through your hotheadedness? This is no sort of talk for you to be making to His Excellency."

"In what way have I failed to exercise my authority as should have been done?" The Governor, addressing Sir Christopher, spoke calmly. I could see, however, that he was irritated, but doing his best to control the feeling. Now and again he tapped upon the table with his slender white fingers.

"In what way have you failed to do what you ought to have done?" repeated Sir Christopher. "That question is quickly answered. What's plainer than that you ought to have seized and thrown into gaol the more blatant of these blasphemers and let them lie there and rot?"

"Yes, and forthwith have placed match to the tow," I heard young Anthony comment to Giles Brewton.

"That would have been the lesson they deserved," went on Sir Christopher. "That would have cowed the whole pack of yapping curs and sent them to shelter, 'stead of leaving them out in the open to make bold application to the Queen. That was the step to take, sir, and none other. Prison for every one of the snapping mongrels."

"A step," spoke up Sir John, "that would as surely as that you are standing there have plunged this whole

Province into a sanguinary conflict. 'Tis no subject for harsh measures, for high-handed dealing," he continued. "These men have been hard-pressed, sorely tried. The laws from the very first have dealt unjustly toward them. They have come hither, lured not only by the charm of religious freedom, for so 'tis down in the charter, but also by the prospect of becoming the possessors of a sufficiency of tillable land to yield a support for their families. And what have they found? The major portion of these lands already in the hands of the favored few."

"Taken up by the land-grabbers," supplemented young Anthony with a boyish laugh.

Sir Christopher glowered at him.

"I want to hear no more of that," he snapped. "What lands the gentlemen of Carolina possess have been honestly gained."

"There is no reason why a man should not become prosperous in this land of many opportunities," said the Governor, entering the discussion. "Only the shiftless are poor here."

"But Your Excellency," Sir John reminded him, "what is a man to do if he is denied possession of the land necessary for his support?"

"Let him go into service, where he and his belong!" exclaimed Sir Christopher. "I tell you 'tis for the salvation of this country that commonalty is kept down, made to know their places. And the idea of such cattle contending for the right of having a hand in the government of a gentleman's country is execrable, damnable, not to be thought of for a moment." He was gesturing so violently with his pipe it fell to the floor, smashing the porcelain bowl.

"God wot, man!" demanded Captain Cantey, "what

have these petulant Dissenters ever done to you that you should berate them so scathingly?"

"They have thrown this whole Province into turmoil; made it a hotbed of wranglers, a land of such unpleasantness it grates upon the nerves. I tell you they ought to be dealt with, as I have suggested, and at once; for they are a nest of vipers, ready to turn and sting the hand that has befriended them."

A mild voice spoke up at this moment.

"Go slow, friend, go slow. No good cause was ever won through harshness. Leave things to work themselves out peacefully."

"And see the country go to perdition!" Sir Christopher flung back.

He who had so mildly spoken was one Master Thomas Lawton, a merchant of Charles Town. I had before seen him at the Governor's. He was advanced in years, but carried himself with an ease and an erectness a more youthful man might have envied. He wore his own hair, which was well-streaked with gray and curled about his forehead. His well-cut, high-bred features betokened the man of birth, though his manner was pleasantly unassuming. 'Twas said that on the maternal side he had come from a Quaker family, and that he had a decided leaning in that direction.

He had heretofore taken no part in the somewhat heated conversation, but had been an attentive listener.

"No danger of that, my friend," he replied to Sir Christopher, "while God rules the universe."

"By what right, I want to know," contended Sir Christopher hotly, "do these base professors of a mongrel religion make the claim that they should have part and parcel in the government of a gentleman's country, the divine right of those only who know and abide by the Truth as it is taught by the one and only Church."

I could see a smile play for a moment about the lips of Master Lawton ere he replied:

"God, my friend, certainly intended the commonalty to play a main part in the affairs of the world or He never would have sent so many of them into it. And to every man He gave the gift of freedom of conscience, which every other man ought to recognize and respect."

"That's treason, sir!" fairly shouted Sir Christopher; "high treason, no less; and you a Churchman!"

"Yes," admitted Master Lawton, "I am a Churchman and happy am I that such is the fact. I am proud to own that I am a Communicant. I love the Church of England, the dignity of its forms, the impressiveness of its service, the divine Truths that it teaches. It is the Church that best suits me. At the same time I grant to all other men the right to make choice of the form of religious worship the conscience of each dictates."

"And you would uphold these heretics in their base religions and bastard creeds?"

"I care not for a man's creed. 'Tis what is in his heart that counts. It won't do, friend; this wrangling over creeds, this splitting of hairs with reference to dogmas. 'Tis un-Christianlike, to say the least."

"Those are heretical views, I tell you, sir; and you are no true Churchman to entertain them."

"And I tell you, friend, that serious trouble is bound to come if this war of hate and dissension continues."

"It will continue, sir, till every man of this mongrel crew is made to know his place; till they bow in submission to the authority of Government and the rule of Holy Church. If a man comes into its communion, he will be recognized as one having the rights of freemen, but not otherwise."

" 'Tis a blinded course you are pursuing, Sir Chris-

topher, and you will yet be brought to see it. 'Human liberty,' as one has wisely remarked, 'is the fairest flower that grows in the garden of a commonwealth.' To seek ruthlessly to pluck and destroy it is a crime against God and man."

"And I say, sir, that to give a heretic a seat in the law-making body of the country is not only a crime but an insult to God Almighty Himself."

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen!" remonstrated the Governor, "this has gone far enough. I beg you to desist."

Sir Nathaniel looked wearied, dejected. He had the air of a man pressed to the wall. He sighed as he spoke and ran his hand over his forehead, as though his head were aching, which no doubt it was. I pitied him from my heart.

There was silence in the room for a space. A breeze lifted the curtains. Through the open window there stole in the perfume of jessamines. From the ballroom, across the hallway, came the intermingled sounds of the music and the feet of the dancers. Within the room here were the grave faces of men grown suddenly clouded with forebodings. Scarce one of them, I was sure, unless it was the hot-headed Sir Christopher, but felt his heart weighted by the fear that trouble was coming on hot-footed.

"If the Council has been reached and the Queen's ear gained," spoke Master Brewton at length, "I am sure 'tis largely Marstone's doings. That firebrand parson set out from the first to outwit us, and I have the feeling that he has at length succeeded. He ought to have been dealt with long ago, checked in the course on which he was bent. There is no telling the harm he has already done by the communications sent over the seas. He has the ear, I've heard, of the Queen's chaplain. They are old friends."

"Well, he has now been dealt with," said Sir Nathaniel with a grim closing of the lips.

"What do you mean by that?" Captain Cantey queried quickly.

"He no longer has a living on which to depend."

"You mean ——" began Master Brewton.

"He has been stripped of it all, his stipend, his good brick house in town; even his plantation with its stock and negro slaves. Further, he has been forbidden to collect any fees for christenings and marriages."

"But man alive!" ejaculated Sir John Coming, his hands uplifted as though to ward off something in the nature of a horror; "you can't do a thing like that, you know, and let it stand! You can't turn a man out to starve in this heartless fashion! Besides, he is still minister of the Church, remember!"

"He's a pitchfork of the devil!" blared Sir Christopher, "and deserves all he's got, even more."

"But think what this act will bring down upon you and the others responsible with you for the deed," Sir John further remonstrated, his gaze upon the Governor. "The indignation of the entire community will be directed against you. Even those who have the more hotly condemned Marstone for his course will censure you for this thing."

What the Governor was about to reply was not known. A servant at that moment entered with a summons from Madam Johnson, as the guests were departing.

The next day, I rallied all my courage and informed the Governor of Langdon's queer behavior on the preceding night.

"That? Tut! Tut! man," said he; "there's nothing suspicious about that. He was no doubt taking a last look upon the festivities ere departing."

"But why do it from the outside, and in so furtive a manner?"

"There is much that is queer about Langdon, I'll admit you," said the Governor at length, and as though unwillingly. "He falls into strange moods, and his behavior at times is truly perplexing. But you can take this assurance from me, Master Ashton, and rely upon it. There isn't a man anywhere who is stauncher in loyalty to the Colony than he. Why, young man, he's ready at any moment to devote not only his means but his life to its defense! He's proved it again and again. No one gave larger sums to the building of forts at Charles Town than he; and in the company that went against the Spaniards at St. Augustine in Moore's expedition, there wasn't one who came back with a braver record than Langdon."

These were the Governor's firmly fixed convictions, as 'twas quite plain, but they were not mine. Neither had his warm words of defense changed in one whit my opinion of Langdon. I had reason to know he was a villain of the deepest dye; one playing a double game. That at present he was engaged in some scheme of treachery, destined to overwhelm with disaster those who trusted him, I was more than ever assured.

CHAPTER XV

SIR NATHANIEL HAS A TILT WITH THE "FIREBRAND PARSON"

SOME days had passed, and I was light of heart again, for Mistress Alecia had shown no disposition to be angry with me for my rudeness in staring so hard at her. Indeed, she had been most gracious and womanly, and at times I had caught a wistful expression in her brown eyes, as though she were sorry for me in my plight of being as yet unable to establish my identity.

Mistress Rose still avoided me at every opportunity, and it was rare that even so much as a word passed between us. I could see that her suspicions of me were still unchanged.

Langdon had not been at Silk Hope since the night of the ball. 'Twas said he was in Charles Town on a matter of business that took up much of his time. I was in nowise inclined to believe this. That he was off on another of his piratical cruises, I was certain, else how could be obtained the lavish display of wealth that made him so grand a gentleman in the Colony?

Forsooth! 'twere easy enough to build forts with money filched from other men.

No definite news had as yet come with reference to the Queen's decision concerning the Church Acts. The uncertainty and the delay were wearing upon the Governor. He was a man beset by anxiety, one burdened with doubts and fears. To add to this troubled condition of his mind, the tide of public opinion was now setting more strongly against him. The Churchmen themselves were not unanimous with him. There had been those opposed to the Acts from the first; some who had pub-

licly registered their protest against the law. Now others were going over to the opposing ranks.

I, as secretary to the Governor, had seen within the past few days a number of letters from Churchmen in which there were not only warnings but upbraidings for the course he was pursuing. Some words from one of these letters I now plainly recalled. The letter had been written by one of the more prominent Churchmen, a close friend of the Governor, as I had learned.

"Be warned in time and change your course," was the plea. "Don't let your loyalty to Granville blind you to the disaster due to overtake this Colony if that course is persisted in. I say to you in all candor you have been carrying things with too high a hand, you and Trott and Rhett. You are wilfully kindling a fire that will soon burst into flames not only to scorch you, but to carry devastation in its path."

In these letters there were, too, strong denunciations of the Governor and Chief Justice Trott and of the others who had acted with them in the proceedings against Parson Marstone.

It was truly a deplorable condition of affairs, the outcome of high-handed injustice every bit of it. I had had time to meet and know some of the very men against whom the Church Acts had been directed. I had grown both to admire and to like them for their sturdy qualities, their friendliness and chivalrous instincts. Generous to a fault they were, as ready to extend the hand of helpfulness as to fight for their rights. These were the men of the Province, true Carolinians every one of them, against whom such gross injustice was being done. That it was injustice I had by now clearly seen.

The Governor had told me the evening before that he wished me to do a good bit of writing for him on this morning. I had seen him come in from the plantation

some moments before, and was now in search of him. As he was not in his study, I was proceeding further in my quest of him, when somewhat suddenly I came face to face with Mistress Alecia.

She was evidently in a mischievous mood this morning, for she flashed me a challenging smile as she swept me a courtesy with exaggerated ceremony.

"Fair Maid," said I, and finding it most agreeable to join with her in this light mood, "can you tell me where I may chance to find the Governor at this hour of the day?"

"And pray, good sir," queried she saucily, "what might you be wanting with His Excellency, the Governor?"

"I bear petition, Mistress, for enactment to be made that will put bridle upon saucy female tongues."

"Then go hence, and bear your petition elsewhere, for 'tis no favor you will find with our Governor for such as that. He is too gallant toward the ladies."

Speaking thus she laughed, and a laugh it was of purest melody, bubbling with a silvery merriment.

She was in a joyous mood this morning. Her twin brother, Clement, whom, it was quite plain to see she adored, had recently come from his school in Charles Town to go over some family matters with the Governor. He was standing near by, much amused at our conversation. She called him now to speak to me. He and his sister were as much alike as peas in a shell. There was the same contour of feature, the same twinkling lights in the brown eyes, though his face lacked the womanly sweetness of hers at this moment. But he was a most engaging lad, of a gay temperament and courteous manner, and very handsome he looked in his finely-fitting dark green coat studded with silver buttons.

I found the Governor on the piazza. A table with

writing materials had been set out in the shade of the vines. The weather was now warm, and it was much pleasanter out here.

He looked up to nod me a greeting, then went on with his reading. He was intently scanning the contents of a newspaper that had come in the last packet of mail from Charles Town. 'Twas a paper called *The Boston News-Letter*, a somewhat plebeian looking affair printed on pot paper, but its coming was always eagerly hailed by the Governor next to that of the *London Spectator*, for it contained news not only of the northern colonies, but of the Mother Country.

Sir Nathaniel looked up again to say:

"The whole world is in a turmoil, it seems. What with wars, dissensions, the wranglings over religion 'tis a most unhappy time."

He sighed as he laid the paper down and motioned me toward the table. I was doing much writing for the Governor of late. He had told me that my duties would be lighter when his son, Robert Johnson, returned. He was now away on a government mission.

I had little more than begun to write, when Peter, one of the black house boys, came to announce, "De parson comin', suh. Mistress she sent me to tell you."

The Governor looked up annoyed. "Parson Thomas?" said he irritably. "What is there so unusual about his coming that I should be told of it?"

" 'Tain't him, suh. It Pa'son Mars'on!"

A flush crept into the Governor's cheeks. The hand, holding a sheet of paper, trembled slightly.

"Very well," said he; "bring him here."

I went on writing, but my heart was beating rapidly. I wondered what was going to happen. I had been told vivid stories of the fiery outbursts of the man styled "The Renegade Parson."

Only a day or so before I had heard the remark made at the highway tavern, where I occasionally went, "The Governor had best take care. The irate parson's hot on his heels."

"And an angered priest, as I have heard said, is the bitterest of enemies," another had observed.

I had no time for further speculation, for now the dominie had appeared upon the piazza, and with him of all men, Major Popple! I went cold at the thought of the warfare that would be waged by the unbridled speech of these two men. There was fear, too, of what the effect would be upon the Governor, a man of steadfast faith in his own opinions, and of a somewhat irascible temperament.

The dominie was of a somewhat heavy build, of a florid coloring; his face now dyed a deep red, whether from exertion in the warm air or from anger, I could not as yet decide.

There was, however, in his eyes, and about his firmly set jaws the look of a man who, having once set out upon a course, is grimly determined to hold to it to the end.

"What can I do for you, gentlemen?" queried the Governor, rising somewhat stiffly.

"What can you do?" Major Popple flung at him. "Haven't you done enough already in your damnable bigotry and tyranny?"

"If you cannot be more courteous, sir," said the Governor, flashing a look at him that was like the play of light along a sword's blade, "I want no further conversation with you."

"Damme, sir! you shall have it whether you want it or not! You've got to listen to some things you ought to have been told long ago. By the beard of the devil, sir ——"

The parson held up a hand to stop him, and turned to the Governor.

"We have come to ask no favor, sir. I hope you are satisfied with what you have already done. You have stripped me bare of a living. You have taken the very roof from over my head, and sent me forth to perish, for aught you cared."

"As foul an act as ever was conceived by bigots and tyrants gone mad with authority!" commented Major Popple hotly. "But hear this, and know that your infamous deed has missed its mark. He's better off than ever. His friends are taking care of that."

"If you thought by such dastardly proceeding," continued Parson Marstone, "to silence my tongue, you were never wilder in your calculations."

"Yes, hang me, sir!" interjected Major Popple, "but you have overstepped yourself this time; called down a more violent tempest of wrath than ever upon your head. You deserve it, and more, and you'll get all that is due you. Don't lose sight of that fact."

As he spoke these words he stuck out his face belligerently. It seemed to me his nose had grown more prominent than ever. Now, as he stood there glowering, it was like nothing so much as a hawk's beak.

"A minister of Holy Church should not soil his robes by mixing in politics," said the Governor quietly, striving, as I could plainly see, to keep his temper under control. "When he so far forgets the sacredness of his calling as to descend to the low estate of seditious brawling, he should suffer for it."

"Blood o' my heart!" blazed Marstone; "shall not a minister stand up against tyranny and injustice? Shall he not become the champion of the oppressed? 'Tis the duty of him who wears the robes of Holy Church to espouse the right, to battle against the wrong. And he

is a sheep and not a man who will see tyranny triumph and not raise a voice or lift a hand to prevent it. I say to you, sir, that I am with the people of this Country in their fight against oppression, against the despotism that would place a yoke upon them as though they were cattle; and there I'll stand, if necessary, till the crack of doom!

"Instead of silencing me by your infamous act of stripping me of my living," went on the irate parson, "you've put a sharper sting than ever into my tongue; missiles of a greater force into my hands; but strengthened the cause I advocate. And now I ask you, sir," he turned belligerently upon the Governor, "what semblance of right, what shred of justice had you for turning upon me so basely as to strip me bare of a living?"

The Governor deliberately took a pinch of snuff; then as deliberately shook the scattered grains from his sleeve ere replying.

"I have already intimated it to you," he said slowly, as though weighing well each word; "but since you seem so dense as not to understand, I will reiterate."

His slender, jeweled fingers tapped for a moment thoughtfully upon his knee, then he proceeded with his speech:

"When one has taken Holy Orders and become a minister of the Church, and vowed to be loyal to the Truths she teaches, to uphold her authority, and then turns traitor, railing out against her, speaking with scandalous tongue against her authorized heads, then has he no longer the right to be fed and clothed from her treasury. What was done," he concluded, his gaze fixed steadily upon the parson, "was no more than loyal Churchmen should have done."

"Loyal Churchmen? Forsooth! To the devil with

such claim! I say, sir, it was the act of a rampant demagogue, a damned tyrant, such as you are, sir; about as fit to be Governor of this Province as a mad bull!"

"And I say, sir," thundered the Governor, rising from his chair, his hand uplifted as though preparing to strike, "that you are a rank turn-feather, a fire-spitting lunatic, fitter for a straight jacket than the sacred desk!".

He sat down again, wiping his heated face with his handkerchief.

"By God, sir!" blazed Major Popple, approaching the Governor in a manner that gave me alarm; "who are you and Trott, and Rhett and—yes, my Lord Granville himself, that you dare take to yourselves the authority for such act of despotism? I suppose you will say 'twas Almighty God Himself who gave it to you. Out upon you for your blinded bigotry, your rank injustice!"

" 'Tis you and those like you who have been disloyal to the Church," said Marstone; "who have thrown discredit upon her by your infamous Church Acts. You prate of the Sacrosanctity of the Communion, yet how do you yourselves regard it? How many times, I ask you, have you and the others of your ilk been to the Communion since those abominable laws were passed? I can tell you to an accuracy how many continuous occasions you have missed. Damn hypocrites you are, sir, each and every one of you! Sniveling upstarts, self-constituted sovereigns of Church and Country!"

"La! La!" said a clacking voice at this moment; "if it isn't that rampaging, fire-eating parson, the Reverend Edward Marstone himself and none other!"

Madam Ball had come out upon the piazza.

"At your service, Madam," said he, turning with a fine show of gallantry to make her obeisance.

"But, Parson! Parson! those words I have just over-

heard were none such as 'tis fitting the anointed of the Lord should utter." Her eyes were twinkling maliciously.

"Madam, I do assure you, the Lord grants even to His anointed the privilege of expressing themselves in righteous wrath. To the devil should not be relegated all the more forceful words."

"Ha! Ha! well said! And have they been making a shorn lamb of you lately, Parson?"

"No fleece have I lost, Madam, that is worth counting. In truth, I have won more than I have lost."

"That pleases me to hear. But dear me! Parson, what have you been doing and saying to His Excellency to give him so dour a countenance?"

"Nothing more, Madam, than is for his good, I assure you."

"Then if such be truly the case, man, persevere! Persevere! If you can succeed in convincing him of the peril of the path he is treading, before his feet reach the brink, then will you be accomplishing a vast benefit not only to us who esteem him, but to the whole country."

These words were said in the gravest tones I had ever heard Madam use, and now she was looking at the Governor, a wistful light in her eyes.

Spots of anger showed in the Governor's cheeks, his eyes flashed.

"I am not to be dictated to by meddlers and blasphemers," said he, and rose as though he would leave the piazza.

"Ta! Ta!" twitted Madam, her mood changing swiftly; "don't act the spoiled child. Even meddlers can sometimes give advice that is worth heeding."

With these words she left us, and I had the hope that the two visitors would follow her example; but not so.

The parson's voice, however, when next he addressed Sir Nathaniel, was some gentler.

"Why will you not be warned in time? I tell you as a friend that the day is fast approaching when, if there is not a radical change made in the conduct of the affairs of this Province, these men, who have been driven like slaves, will throw off the yoke, and blood will flow."

"I have before heard these croakings," said the Governor, gazing at him steadily, "and they have in no whit disturbed me."

"But they should disturb you!" flashed Major Popple. "You and your advisers are stark mad to have pursued the course you have. Here is this Province surrounded by enemies that at any moment may fall upon it. Indians on the one hand, Spaniards on the other; and the French threatening to attack us by sea. Isn't this trouble enough without stirring up trouble at home? Plunging the whole country into a state of chaos; setting at the throats of each other those who ought to stand together as one man in the common defense. 'Tis the maddest folly, I again warn you, to continue in the course you are pursuing.

"But I can see," he broke off with a sardonic chuckle, "that you are not as assured concerning this course as you would have it appear. Right now you are waiting uneasily to see which way the cat will jump; in trepidation for fear it will not be the way you desire. In other words, what the Queen will do. Let me tell you now and here she is not going to do as you are hoping."

"Yes; that she will not," agreed Marstone. "I am fully satisfied as to that."

"You seem to know a great deal," sneered the Governor.

"I know enough, sir, of conditions in England at this

time to state with conviction that to you and Chief Justice Trott and Admiral Rhett, and the others who have connived with you in the infamy put upon the people of this Colony is due a big surprise."

"We have but proved our loyalty to our Sovereign and her interests," retorted Sir Nathaniel. "She will reward us."

"Queens, as well as Kings, let me remind you, sir, are good at forgetting when your day of service ceases to be of value to them."

This thrust brought a deep flush to the Governor's face.

"My God, man!" ejaculated Marstone, "are you going to continue in your blindness? Will you not see? Will you persistently disregard the chaotic conditions to which this Province has been brought through the tyranny and mismanagement of a government having its seat three thousand miles away? An oligarchy composed of men who know little about this Colony, and care less; men bent solely upon their own gains? And at the head of this government an arrant bigot, a feudal despot, a man determined to rule or ruin!"

"That is treason, sir. Beware!"

"If treason it is, then so be it! Truth demands to be spoken. Good Lord! Sir Nathaniel, are you asleep? or wilfully obdurate? Can you not see the trend of affairs? Have you not yet caught an inkling of the changes that are coming? Has no wind of premonition brought to you the drift of events? I say to you that, as near as are the people of this Province to a revolution, it may not be necessary for them to rise up and throw off the yoke. If they wait long enough, their redress will come from the Mother Land, from their Sovereign herself."

"I've heard enough of this ranting," declared the

Governor, rising and waving his hand in dismissal. "I want no more of it. I bid you good-day, gentlemen."

But they were not thus to be gotten rid of. Marstone hung on with the bulldog tenacity for which he was noted, finding ample encouragement in Major Popple's fiery utterances.

I had perforce to sit and listen, my uneasiness growing, my pen poised idly; for who could write connectedly in this blare of voices? I thought it a pity men could not adjust their differences in calmer manner. And the day was so out of tune with this fierce wrangling.

'Twas a day to bring only peace to the heart and kindness to the lips. Long shafts of sunlight played over the lawns; through the vines came the perfume of flowers richly abloom; while notes of the sweetest melodies were issuing from the throats of the birds. Yet here were men giving violent vent to their passions, abusing and incriminating each other.

" 'Pon my soul!" fairly shouted Parson Marstone, "never have I seen a man so bent upon his own destruction! Have you no discernment? Can you not see how Granville is using you as his tool, having you rake his chestnuts out of the coals? I tell you in all friendliness that my Lord Granville's day is over. The government at the head of which he has set himself up, a grasping, conscienceless potentate, is tottering to its fall. The royal authorities have awakened to its abuses. 'Twill not be long now 'til the crash comes; then where do you suppose you will stand when that befalls?"

Much more was said, but all along the same line, 'til the Governor, who had so far, with one or two exceptions, held himself under fair control, blazed forth in his wrath, and refused to hear another word; entering the house and leaving them there on the piazza. But

when they had gone and he had returned to his chair, 'twas to show the appearance of a man utterly crushed and out of heart. And on the next day, which was the Sabbath, we heard while on our way to the church services, from those newly come up the river from Charles Town, confirmation of that which Parson Marstone and Major Popple had intimated. By ship just arrived from the Mother Land had come definite news. Master Boone had succeeded in his mission. The Queen's ear had been reached, and she had acted. The Church laws would be abolished.

'Twas as bright and joyous a May Day as any I had seen in Bonnie England; to me the sweetest time of all the year. The whole earth was teeming with the fragrance and the beauty of Nature. Amid the green spaces of the forests hung snowy clouds of the dogwood blossoms; wild flowers of every hue shone like gems among the grasses; in the amber glow of the sunlight sported butterflies with brilliantly colored wings. Through the warm air came pungent scent of bursting sassafras buds.

The church building, erected of cypress wood and heavily shingled, stood in the very heart of the forest. All about it rose the majestic pines, beautiful and solemn. 'Twas a sweet, reposeful scene, but I noted that every man going to or gathered about the building carried a musket, its long barrel gleaming in the sunlight. Grim reminders they were of the peril that threatened. At any moment there might come the attack of savage foes. Danger lurked behind every bush and tree.

There was considerable excitement and much lively discussion as the late news spread from group to group of those gathered about the building, awaiting the beginning of the services. Relief, an animated pleasure

was depicted upon many countenances, while on others again there was chagrin and gloomy looks.

"'Tis the greatest news that has come to this Province in many a day," I heard one man remark to another. "Our Queen has acted with both humanity and wisdom. God bless her! Now there will be opportunity to attain to peace and prosperity."

"I beg to differ with you, friend," was the reply. "'Tis about the worst thing could have happened. 'Twill weaken the government; and now will there be greater turmoil than ever."

There was still evidence of the excited state of feeling, the disturbed condition of men's minds, even after the sacred edifice was entered and the services had begun. But the voice of Parson Thomas was calm and weighted with earnestness as he plead with those before him to purge their hearts of all bitterness, to forget their differences, and to live for the glory of God, the welfare of each other, and the prosperity of their country. He was truly a good man and filled with holy ardor.

I could well imagine what was passing in the mind of the Governor as I sat beside him in the pew. He was in appearance as a man stricken; overwhelmed by the crushing blow of defeat, where he had prepared himself for victory. His voice had lost all its clearness and fulness as he joined in the responses, and his hand, that held the Prayer Book, was far from steady.

I had sometime since discovered him to be a man of great stubbornness of will; one firmly wedded to his own ideas and opinions; autocratic and self-dominant to a high degree. More than once had I heard him say that a man should have no master save God and the King; yet he had driven men as a master drives slaves; while he himself had been driven by the Palatine. That it was more the soldier's obedience to the orders of his superior,

than aught else, that had kept him staunch in the course pursued, I was by now convinced. Thus he had come to be stamped a political and religious tyrant, when, as I believed, he was kindly of heart; upright and conscientious according to his light.

Plainly was he showing now in his haggard face, drawn with suffering, his seventy-odd years. I wondered if there was still ringing in his ears those prophetic words uttered by the fiery parson, "Queens, as well as Kings, are good at forgetting when your day of service ceases to be of value."

Suddenly, as I sat thus, musing and disturbed, there floated through the stillness of the church a glorious voice lifted in a song of praise:

"My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit rejoices in God, my Saviour."

'Twas a voice rich with melody, the sweetest, the loveliest that ever I had heard. My heart thrilled at the sound of it. As those golden notes, rising, falling, vibrant with the ecstasy of the singer, telling of joy, of peace, of hope, fell upon my ears, it was as though my spirit were lifted up far above the sordid things of the world to the very gates of Heaven. I sat there trembling with the rapture of it, as the whole space about me throbbed with the melody.

'Twas a woman's voice, and one knew at once that the singer was young and glowing with ardor. Of course, it could be none other than Mistress Rose, for had I not seen her in the choir loft when I entered the church?

Yes, there she was, as I plainly saw, on turning to pass from the pew. How regally beautiful she looked, her head held high, her carriage that of a queen. And no wonder she conducted herself with an air of roy-

alty, with all her physical gifts and that divine voice added!

Near her was Mistress Alecia, exquisitely gowned, radiant as the May Day itself. She was like some gay butterfly in her dress of golden hue, with its bands of black. She dropped me a demure courtesy as she passed on ahead of me through the doorway; but, as she turned to give me a swift backward glance, I caught a mischievous twinkle in her eyes. Had she caught me, I wondered, staring at Mistress Rose with that rapt expression on my face?

CHAPTER XVI

I HEAR A MOCK-BIRD'S SONG AND HAVE AN AWAKENING

THERE had been some days of hard rains that had put an end for the time to all outdoor pursuits; but now the sun was shining again.

The Governor had entrusted me with instructions for the overseer in one of the rice fields. The planting of the grain was still going on, though it was near to the close of the season.

I had heard the story of how the cultivation of rice had grown to be one of the more important industries of the Colony.

Some years before, the skipper of a vessel newly-out from Madagascar, brought his ship to anchor in Charles Town harbor. Having had some previous acquaintance with Landgrave Thomas Smith, a resident of the town, he sought him out, and was kindly received. On parting from the Landgrave, the skipper remarked that in his opinion the moist lands in and about the town were finely adapted to the growing of rice. The Landgrave was interested, and expressed the desire to have some seed for the purpose of experimenting. Ere leaving the port, the skipper sent him a small bag of the grain from the cooks' galley.

The first experiments were made in the Landgrave's town garden, and were so successful, he told his neighbors of it; and generously offered to share with them the seed of this first harvest. Other plantings were made, both in the town and on the plantations; other seeds from sowings were shared, till by this time there was scarce a planter, having lands favorable to its cultivation, who had not added the valuable grain to his

annual crops. Not only was it raised for home consumption, but hundreds of barrels of it were shipped each season from Charles Town port to other lands. Among all the planters the Governor ranked foremost, as was also the case in the production of silk.

So, it was that I had set forth this morning, with Cupid at my heels, to take the Governor's instructions to his overseer.

'Twas a glorious morning after the heavy rains, though still somewhat sodden under foot. But above me the heavens were as blue and soft as sapphire velvet, while the sunlight glowed like minted gold. All Nature seemed newly bathed in the crystal dew of Heaven. The freshly opened blooms of the crêpe-myrtle made roseate glow all along the path by which I went. To my nostrils came the delightful odors of roses and honeysuckles.

A black maid at the buttery door smiled at me and dropped me a courtesy, showing her wonderful teeth. All these black creatures had such white glistening teeth. I had before marveled at it.

I was about to open the gate that led into the mulberry grove, when an excited, high-pitched voice calling my name halted me. I turned to see the little maid Affra running toward me and making gestures to stop me.

"Where—where are you bound, Master Ashton?" she queried as she reached me, and almost breathless from her running.

"To the farther rice field, to carry messages for the Governor."

"May I not go with you? Oh, please. Master Ashton, do not say no!"

She caught my hand and held it while she pleaded.

"But 'tis some distance," I reminded her, "and still quite wet under foot."

"I have on my stoutest shoes. Oh, you must not refuse me."

"But will not your sister object to your going?"

"Alec? No; surely not. She is out herself. I think she has gone to see old Judith. Alec isn't dainty about the weather," she added. "She doesn't mind the rain or anything."

"Well, if you will promise to tell her I demurred about taking you, but that you insisted, you can come along."

"Oh, thank you, thank you! Alec isn't going to blame you, Master Ashton; not with anything. She thinks too highly of you."

"Are you sure of that, Affra, my sweet?" It surprised me how anxiously I waited the answer.

"As sure as sure can be. I have heard her again and again take your part when Mistress Rose was saying ugly things about you."

"So, Mistress Rose does not like me?"

"That she does not! and it is hateful of her!" Affra stamped her foot.

We were through the mulberry grove now and skirting one of the fields, where the slaves in their brightly-colored cottons, woven on the plantation, were at work, and singing at their tasks. 'Twas somewhat like a chant, of a mournful cadence, unlike the lively song of the rowers who had brought us up the river, and it gave me an eerie feeling to hear it. But they seemed contented at their labor, and there was no overseer here with cruel lash to drive them.

At the farther end of this field there was a strip of forest through which we would pass to reach the low lands beyond, where the rice fields lay. We had just entered it when suddenly there floated to me from some near-by retreat among the trees the sweetest bird-notes

that ever I had heard, and I had listened many times since I had come to Silk Hope to the silvery melodies that poured from the throats of these divine feathered songsters, the mock-birds.

As I paused to hearken further, I heard, as it seemed, one bird answer another. Then again came a trill of melody, clearer, higher-pitched, yet with the same liquid softness and sweetness; to be repeated by the other singer.

"'Tis two birds making music together," said I to the little maid beside me.

Then, just as I spoke, there came such a burst of melodious song, so enthrallingly sweet, it set me all aquiver with the ecstasy of it.

"'Tis no two birds singing," said Affra, smiling up at me; "but Alec; and she is trying to get a mock-bird to answer. Oh, Master Ashton!" she broke forth, "did you not know that Alec could sing like that? Why, did you not hear her at church the past Sunday? To be sure you did."

These words rooted me to the spot in amaze. The revelation fair dazed me. Could it be possible? Mistress Alecia and not Mistress Rose the possessor of that glorious voice that had so filled the church with its enthralling music?

The little maid looked at me queerly, and no wonder; for there I stood motionless, and unable to speak, my heart performing all kind of queer antics.

"Mistress Rose cannot sing," said Affra, as though in some uncanny way she had read my thought. "Her voice is like the door creaking. And she is jealous of Alec. She says Alec's voice is too loud for a woman; that it is more like a man's. You do not think so, do you, Master Ashton?"

I had found my speech by now. "No, my sweet, I

do not." How could I have such thought of a voice like that of the sweetest thrush or mock-bird that ever lilted?

"Come!" urged Affra; "and I will show you 'tis Alec."

She grasped my hand, but I held back. 'Twere sacrilege, it seemed to me, to invade the sanctity of that spot, from which there came now another glorious lilt of song that set all the space about us athrob with its melody.

When Affra again urged me I followed her, though still in a daze. Then suddenly, through an opening in the shrubbery, I saw.

Alec stood there beneath a tree, her head uplifted, a sweet, rapt expression upon her face. At some sound we made, she turned swiftly. At the look she gave me, as I caught the soft splendor of the eyes turned full upon me, my heart went all into a tumult. I felt as though I were lifted up till no longer my feet touched the earth. Then as swiftly as the bird darts upward in its flight, revelation came. Now did I understand clearly the queer behavior of my heart.

'Twas not real love I had given to the stately Rose. Her beauty had enthralled me. It had been like an intoxication. 'Twas merely the eyes' food and not the soul's joy. The beauty of the rose without the fragrance. But here was love in truth, a love like the glow of the sun on the flowers, like everything that was beautiful and sweet and rare. Here was the woman who would dwell in my heart its adored Mistress forever more.

Then as swiftly as the ecstasy of the revelation had exalted me, did a knowledge that now came hurl me downward into an abyss of gloom, where the blackness of night encompassed me. Now, at last when I knew real love, it was for a woman betrothed to another man.

Woe was me! Was there never to be any happiness for me in the world?

A rage seized me at the thought of my woeful lot. I clenched my fingers and inwardly hurled anathemas at the Fate that had tricked me all my life. Was I doomed to an unloved existence through all the years of my allotted span? Why was it, I questioned hotly, that some men had everything and others nothing? With good grace at that moment I could have seized St. Julien and pitched him into the river.

A silvery tinkle of laughter broke in upon these black thoughts. I raised my head to see Mistress Alecia gazing at me, a quizzing expression on her face, a glint of merriment in her eyes.

"Why such dour looks this morning, Master Ashton? Has aught gone wrong to so disturb you?"

She flashed me a smile that made chaos in my heart; and as I stood there, awkward as any lout, and for the moment finding no words with which to reply, 'twas Affra who came to my aid.

"I suspect," said she, "he is not well pleased because I teased him into bringing me along. He is going to the rice fields with messages from Sir Nathaniel."

"So you did torment him, you little witch, till there was naught else to do but to yield consent? 'Tis like you, Moppet, to have your way."

The words were bantering, but there was a caressing note in her voice as she smiled whimsically at her little sister. Her face glowed with love. There was about her this morning a pure sweet-heartedness that did set well upon her, with just a spice of mischief to give it flavor.

Now clearly did I see how very sweet and truly womanly was she, with all those gentle virtues of heart and grace of soul that would make of the earth a

Paradise for the man she loved. And she was not for me!

"I assure you, Mistress, it was no hardship," said I, finding speech at last, "but altogether a pleasure to fetch my little sweetheart along. 'Twas only that I feared the way was too wet, and that you might not care to give your consent."

"Oh, my consent would have mattered not one whit to the little vixen, once she had made up her mind, eh, imp?"

With this she stooped and put her arm about Affra, drew her close and kissed her. And Affra, throwing her arms up about her sister's neck impulsively, to draw her face down to return the caress, cried out, "Oh, Alec, darling, you know I wouldn't do a single teenty thing you didn't want me to do! I knew well enough you would not mind my coming with Master Ashton; for," casting an arch glance first at me and then at her sister, "has not one the right to go where one pleases with one's future husband?"

Mistress Alecia greeted this with a burst of merry laughter. Her lips were twitching and her eyes atwinkle as she replied, "So it would appear. But take care now, and see to it that you conduct yourself in the becoming manner of an affianced young lady."

Here she stooped to fondle Cupid, who all this while had been making frantic effort to gain her attention.

She waved us good-bye as we started off; Cupid, first coming a little way after us, then darting back again to her, as though undecided to which one he would attach himself for the time. Then, apparently making up his mind that to follow me would bring him more adventure, he stuck to my heels.

As we went on I could hear young birds chirping and fluttering in the nests. A brooding sweetness was over

all the land. Brown and gold butterflies sported in the sunlight. But none of this brightness and sweetness entered my heart. A cloud of gloom enveloped me, for had I not a short time ago received the heaviest blow that could be dealt to the heart of man?

There was on the side of the forest through which we were now passing, gloomy looking thickets of the wax myrtle and dwarf cedar. 'Twould be a fine lurking-place, I thought, for an enemy, especially for the red savage; and with the thought came an uneasy feeling. Soon, however, it departed, for there had been no rumors of late to disturb us.

Beyond the forest was an abandoned field, dotted with persimmon and sassafras growths, with gleaming white stretches of sand between them.

Suddenly, at the edge of the forest, Affra halted me.

"There's a robin up there on that bough," said she. "Let us watch it, Master Ashton. 'Tis the first one I've seen this spring. If it flies up when it leaves the limb, then 'tis the sign that good luck will come to us. But if it flies down 'twill be bad luck. If, when it starts to fly, it turns to the right, it will mean that we are to go traveling; but if it be to the left, then we are to stay at home. There!" cried out she joyously, "it has gone straight up! Oh, now there is to be good luck for us!"

I was about to reply, to make the gloomy statement that so far as I was concerned there was never to be any good luck in the world for me, when my attention was attracted by the queer behavior of Cupid. He had darted ahead of us with a sharp whine, then with a bark as of sudden recognition of someone, or something familiar; and now he had slunk back again, whimpering, his tail between his legs.

I cast searching glance in the direction, and at that moment a man emerged from behind a tree. To my

amazement I saw that it was Langdon. He it truly was, and with blacker look than ever I had yet seen on his face. What could he be doing here? I wondered. But now I had other thought to engage me; for at his approach, Cupid's behavior grew still queerer. He was crouching against me, trembling and whimpering. The little beast was fair frightened out of his senses, as was quite plain.

"What is the matter with the dog?" I queried sharply. "Did you kick him?"

"How, in the devil's name, does that matter to you if I did?" he flung at me.

He was in a fiendish mood, as I clearly saw; but I was in no degree to be dismayed by it.

"It matters to the extent that the dog is mine, and I will not have him ill-treated."

"Yours? Ha! Ha! this is good. The statement does amuse me mightily. Belial!" he thundered to the dog; "come here to me! Come this instant! Do you not hear me, sir? To me, Belial!"

Cowed and trembling, Cupid obeyed, crouched to the ground as he dragged himself along.

I started to interfere, but I was not quick enough; for at the moment I moved forward, Langdon, having advanced, struck at the dog with his booted foot. A glancing blow it turned out to be, but even with that it was sufficient to send the poor little beast back to me, yelping with pain.

A feeling of rage swelled up within me. Many times had I felt the urge to get my hands on him, the black-hearted villain, who had robbed me of that which had left me nameless and under suspicion in a strange land. Now at his savage treatment of a helpless little creature that had grown dear to me, I was fair mad to strike out at him. I advanced, my hand uplifted.

"Not so fast, my game chick," he warned, a devilish gleam in his eyes. "You will rue the day you put hand on me."

But I was not to be frightened. I stood my ground.

"Brute!" I said; "to so treat a helpless little creature."

He gave me look for look.

"I treat my own as I please," he told me coolly.

A light broke over me. Now no longer could there be the least shadow of a doubt.

"So! you own to his possession?" I queried of him in tones that matched his own for coolness.

Something must have forewarned him.

"That's neither here nor there," he retorted. "The dog's yours, it seems. How should I have aught of claim to him?"

I laughed in his face.

"Poorly countered!" I told him. "You have at last betrayed yourself. The dog was once yours; and now of a surety do I know you for that same black-hearted scoundrel, none other than Black Locks himself, who did rob me and others aboard the *Abigail and Anne*."

"Have a care to your words," he flung at me. "Your speech is rash, and as such you will suffer for it."

His countenance was truly diabolical at that moment. I wondered why he had not ere this lunged at me; but something seemed to hold him back.

"I've suffered enough at your hands already," I replied to him. "Now must there be a reckoning between us. Several times have I come near to demanding it. Now shall it be put off no longer."

And now would I have assuredly flung myself upon him but for two hands that gripped mine and clung to it, and a high-pitched childish voice, shrill with fear, that entreated: "Oh, Master Ashton! do not strike him!

Do not fight with him! Oh! please, please! He is a bad man. He may kill you."

I turned to soothe the distress of the little maid who thus plead with me; while Langdon threw up his head to laugh wickedly as he exclaimed:

"Yes, little Mistress, I am indeed a bad, bad man! so very bad in truth, that no man yet who has ever struck me has lived to tell of it." Then he broke off with further fiendish laughter.

" 'Tis truly amusing," he continued, "to see the look on faces, feminine faces especially, when I tell of the power I have of bending human beings to my will. Of how that I can bring men cringing to me merely by the flicker of an eyelid, or send them here and yon by the crook of a finger; and of how no man yet has ever been able to say that he has conquered me in anything."

"Oh!" exclaimed Affra with quickly indrawn breath; " 'tis thus he talks to Mistress Rose!"

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Langdon more boisterously than ever. " 'Tis thus I talk to Mistress Rose! Most amusing this!"

My blood was boiling by this time. I faced him with a determination he nor any other man could weaken, no matter what his boasting.

"You shall answer to me for this," I told him, "as well as for other things."

"Very well," he replied laconically. "I'm at your service at any time you are ready to pass out of the world."

Never had I seen him in so devilish a mood nor with quite so saturnine an expression upon his face. There was something sinister now in his countenance that I had not before noted. More than ever did he recall to mind the leering villain who with his piratical crew had descended upon the *Abigail and Anne.*

"'Tis no place here," I told him further. "For the little maid's sake we must defer matters. Now when shall it be? For as sure as the sun is shining above us, shall you answer to me for all the wrong you've done me."

"To-morrow morning," said he with devilish grin; "since you are so anxious to start upon your journey to Hades."

"The time? The place?"

"At ten of the clock at Oaklands. I presume you know the place?"

"I know it. And the weapons?"

"Swords. It will pleasure me to prick you for a while, to hear you howl for mercy like a thin-skinned dog ere I dispatch you."

"It will be a yellower dog that will do the howling," I told him, and laughed in his face.

It sent him into a black rage. He made threatening movement toward me as he hurled the words, scowlingly.

"You will laugh upon the other side of your face, sirrah, before I am through with you. Imbecile! Dolt!" he sputtered, "have you no more sense than to provoke me to a contest with swords? 'Twill be as easy as turning a fowl on a spit to run you through."

With these words, and another burst of fiendish laughter, he turned and disappeared as swiftly as he had come into view. There was something mysterious about it; uncanny in fact.

As we went on our way, Affra began to entreat me.

"Oh, Master Ashton, you surely will not do so perilous a thing as to go to meet that wicked Master Langdon at Oaklands? Oh, please, please do not go!"

"But I must, my sweet. He has cruelly wronged me, and he must suffer for it."

"Oh! but he may kill you! He said that he would."

"That was only boasting, dear heart. I am skilled with the sword; never fear."

"Oh! but he is a dreadful, dreadful man! He is worse than ever I thought him. Never have I seen him look so terrible. He fair frightened me. It must be that the Ogre is at the Castle, and that he has put his wicked spell on Master Langdon. Oh! do not go to Oaklands, I beg it of you, Master Ashton."

She was crying now, and it took me sometime to comfort her, and a longer time to bring the smiles back to the eyes that were so like another pair that had wrought such havoc with my heart.

I was pondering deeply this meeting with Langdon. The change in him had been most amazing. Now that I the more calmly considered it, it was truly mystifying. One thing that had struck me more forcefully than aught else was the coarsened strain in him; for never before had I seen him with any other manner than that of the elegant gentleman. Then there had been Cupid's astonishing behavior. Two or three times, to my knowledge, had Cupid been in Langdon's presence, and at not one of these times had the little dog shown any fear of him, neither had there been any recognition of the dog on Langdon's part. I could only set it all down to the fiendish change in Langdon's appearance. In that devilish mood he had fair frightened the little dog out of its senses. I had heard more than once of the devil's taking full possession of a man, and here was a clear case of it.

With this in mind, I ought to have looked forward with some degree of dread to my encounter with him on the morrow. But I was too wrought up with anger to care. He had foully wronged me, and for this wrong he should answer. And if it were so that he still had in his possession the papers of such vital importance to me, he should be made to give them up.

CHAPTER XVII

I GO TO MEET A VILLAIN WITH A MOST ASTONISHING RESULT

I was up betimes the following morning. 'Twas a gladsome day, with the sun's gold flooding the window-panes, and a chorus of bird-notes making carnival without. There was a fierce joy in my heart at the thought of what lay before me on this day. Now at last would I stand face to face with that black-hearted scoundrel, Langdon, and hold him to account for the foul wrongs done me.

I confess that I was somewhat mystified as I went over the circumstances leading up to this last encounter with him. Why, when he had heretofore refused to cross swords with me, refraining with a wistfulness of expression that had mightily amazed me, was he now so diabolically eager for the combat?

There were some duties to perform for the Governor ere I could set forth on the journey to Oaklands, to meet the scoundrel whom I was this day determined to teach a lesson to, unless my hand had forgotten its cunning.

Yet it might be that I should fall by his hand. He had sworn to dispatch me to Hades. He was an accomplished swordsman, as I well knew; for had I not heard lauded again and again his skill with the blade? But no matter, I would not lose heart. Long ago I had taken unto myself the advice of wise old Epictetus, "He who fears, or grieves, or worries is no freeman." Now would I go fearlessly to meet the villain who awaited me, and with God's help would I give him the lesson he deserved.

I had started forth on one of the errands for the Governor, when I suddenly encountered Mistress Alecia, coming from the gardens, her arms laden with flowers.

I was almost upon her ere I discovered her. As I started back awkwardly, stammering an apology, she laughed merrily. 'Twas like the chiming of silver bells.

"I bid you good-morning, Master Mark Ashton," said she, dropping me a demure courtesy, while the rose tint in her cheeks deepened.

And there I stood, as loutish as any country bumpkin, unable to utter a word, and with my heart thumping so loudly, I was sure she must hear it.

She lifted her chin to send me an amused glance, lips twitching, eyes all atwinkle, the sunshine falling about her like a golden veil. And with all the freshness and sweetness of the morning around us, there was nothing sweeter or lovelier than she.

"And whither are you bound, Master Ashton, so early in the day, and in so thoughtful a mien?" she queried.

"I go on an errand for His Excellency, Mistress," I replied, finding voice at last.

She glanced downward for a moment. Then, as the long dark lashes were lifted, I saw a somewhat wistful look in her eyes.

"Master Ashton," said she, and there was the hint of a strained note in her voice, "it has been told me by Affra that to-day you go to Oaklands for duel with Master Langdon. Is this true?"

"It is, Mistress. The little maid has told you truly."

She bent over the flowers, fingering them. When she raised her head again, it was to query somewhat unsteadily:

"Why, why are you bent on doing this?"

"Because that scoundrel has foully wronged me, Mistress, and must now answer for it."

She reached out and put a hand on my shoulder, then almost as quickly withdrew it; but it had rested there long enough for me to feel it trembling.

"Oh, this must not be!" she broke forth. "It is rash! It is perilous for you! Do you not know that he is accounted the most finished swordsman in the Province?"

"I am no mean handler of the blade myself," I told her, my pride touched to the quick by the doubt of me implied in her words.

"Oh, now are you vexed with me!" Her voice rang out vibrantly. "You must not be. 'Tis for your good, your safety, your very life it may be, that I speak to warn you. Do not go to Oaklands. Do not have encounter with this man. He is a devil in human shape!"

Now was her sweet face upturned to mine with a wistfulness, a pleading in it that did set my heart to behaving like a mad thing. Did she really care so much? Did it matter to her whether I lived or died? I do not know what rash thing I would have done but for the sudden remembrance that she was the betrothed of another man. Bitterly did I curse the Fate that had played me such a trick in the shuffling of the cards of Destiny.

Her interest, her desire to have me forego the peril that awaited me at Oaklands was, I was satisfied, no more than the sympathy of a maid's tender heart.

"Fair Mistress," I began, striving for composure, "this man has foully wronged me, and honor demands that I call him to account."

"Honor? Forsooth! are there no courts in the land, whereby men may find redress for their wrongs, instead of resorting to bloody encounter with pistol and sword?"

"Madam, there is no court in the Province that will touch this man, strongly entrenched as he is behind the bulwark of pretense and falsehood, which he has so cunningly erected. He is masquerading as a gentleman, whereas he is as ravening a wolf as ever paraded in

sheep's covering; for now do I know him beyond the shadow of a doubt to be that same black-hearted scoundrel, the pirate chief, Black Locks. He robbed me not only of my gold, but of the papers without which I am nameless, discredited, held to be no more than an adventurer here in this strange land."

"Oh, do not say that!" she cried out sharply, passionately. "You should not speak so of yourself."

"It is worse than I have stated, Madam," I went on. "I am even named as 'redemptioner,' as 'escaped bonded slave,' who has fled the Virginia tobacco fields, forfeiting my bond. Oh, do you not see what it means to me to force that villain, if it be in my power, to restore to me that which is like life itself?"

In the emotion that swept over me, my voice trembled, my face worked convulsively. Scarce knowing what I did, my hands were extended in pleading.

If she, the woman I so hopelessly loved, would only see this matter as it so vitally concerned me, it would be some balm to the sore wound.

She made movement toward me, as though in her sympathy she would grasp my hands, then drew back in quick embarrassment. I saw her eyes flash, her face flame, and I knew it to be anger.

"Who dared to call you such names?"

"It does not matter, Mistress. I name no names, but the sting is here." I placed my hand against my breast.

" 'Tis not necessary that you name names. And you care for the sting in her tongue?" she flashed at me.

"Madam, when a man is already sorely wounded, 'tis any barb, no matter whence it comes, that can give fierce pain. Oh, do you not see," I made plea of her again, "how my very name has been taken from me? That for aught I can prove to the contrary, I may be the adventurer it is claimed I am?"

"'Tis few who believe that, while many do not; I for one," said she staunchly.

As the words were spoken, she glanced full at me, and the glow I saw in her eyes set my heart to racing. Then she did at least believe in me, though she could not love me?

"But what—what do you know of me?" I stammered.

"I know a gentleman when I see one," said she, and oh, the sweetness and womanliness that were in that lovely face!

"One must be mad to stamp you 'redemptioner,' 'bonded slave,'" and again the sweet voice rose vibrantly.

"But there have been gentlemen who were bonded slaves," I reminded her.

"But not you, Mark," her voice lingered, "Ashton of Ashtonholme!"

Now at those words and what I saw in her face, I could have taken her in my arms and confessed all, my great love for her that was fair consuming me at that moment. But what madness it would have been, and she the promised bride of another!

"And you are still bent on this mad thing?" she queried once more, "of going to Oaklands for encounter with the man your own words have stamped as a black-hearted fiend?"

There was a note in her voice that thrilled me with its sweet concern, but still did I manage to keep control of myself. If I lost honor, I would lose all.

"Then God help you, Mark Ashton," she said as she turned away, "for now does it seem that that is all that is left to you."

I caught the sound of a quickly indrawn breath; and, as I raised my head a moment or so later to gaze after her, I saw that she had halted in the path and turned

about to look back at me. And what I again saw in her face, of concern, of pleading, caused me to well-nigh give over my determination to meet Langdon, and to yield to her sweet entreaties. But no, this must not be! Not even at the persuasion of the woman I so madly loved would I turn weakling and fail to face the villain who awaited me.

I had passed through the main gateway of Silk Hope, and had proceeded but a short distance along the highway, when I caught the sound of horse's feet behind me. I turned to see a rider coming post haste after me, as though he gave me a chase. Now what could be the meaning of it? I wondered. Had the Governor found urgent need of me and sent messenger to bring me back? 'Twould be most provoking if such were the case. But as the rider drew nearer, I quickly decided that here was no serving man. Instead 'twas a cavalier on mettlesome steed somewhat gaily caparisoned, the trappings flashing in the sunlight.

I could see, too, that the rider was young, and that he wore a hat caught up at the side with a sparkling jewel.

When I had gazed further, and he had drawn still nearer, I recognized him. 'Twas none other than Master Hastings, brother to Mistress Alecia.

He made a most graceful figure in the saddle, responding to every movement of his steed. As he drew up beside me and gave me a nod of his handsome head, he looked most delightfully youthful and altogether engaging. Truly had I never looked upon a more debonair lad; and so like was he to his sister, my heart fair turned over at sight of him.

He was attired, as I was sure, in his finest array, in the green coat with its shining silver buttons I had

before admired on him. His breeches were of the same handsome green cloth, and his shirt of the finest linen, with falls of lace at neck and wrists. The long vest of gleaming satin was strung with pearls. Feet and legs were encased in glossy leather riding boots of a pattern borrowed, as I knew, from those of the gentlemen of Spain. No young peacock could show gayer plumage, and altogether was he as charming a youngster as ever I had seen; by far too pretty for a lad. Some day he would break women's hearts, if he had not already done so.

But what the devil was the young cock after, following me in this fashion? Had he been sent by his sister to have care of me? At the thought my heart went hot with resentment. A pretty pickle, indeed, if I had to have a lad like this as guardian!

"I give you good-day, sir," said he as he drew up beside me, and lifted his hat from his ringleted head. "I am of the notion to join you in your ride this morning," he continued. "Have aught of objection?"

"Yes," replied I bluntly, "I have, since I go on journey of such nature I care not for companion."

"But," persisted he, " 'tis safer for two to ride together than for one to go alone."

"The journey on which I go," I told him boastfully, "is one of such safety, there is no need that other should accompany me."

"A safe journey?" echoed he. "Oh, to be sure! since you have so named it. But safe journeys, as I have heard, are rare in these parts. Come!" continued he, drawing nearer and ogling me. "Best take me along. A most pleasing companion I'll prove, I do assure you."

Now did he show that trick of arching brows and curving lips that would have been most engaging in the other sex. Had the lad been a maid, he could have

achieved much success in playing the coquette. But despite the coaxing light in the eyes fixed upon me, I held out against him.

"I prefer to go alone," I told him shortly; "and if you really desire to please me, you will turn around and go back."

"Oh, now," said he reprovingly, and flashing me a smile so like his sister's it fair upset me, "there is no need to be so crusty. Art in love, and has your fair one flouted you, that you take on so gloomy a mien? Ha! ha!" laughed he, "when you know as much about women as I do, you'll never take one to really mean what she says or does."

"What really know you of the ways of women, Graybeard?" I twitted him.

It pleased me, despite my mood, to suffer his humor. What a light-hearted lad he was, with the same spirit of mischief atwinkle in his eyes that I had seen in his sister's.

"I have large acquaintance with women, I do assure you, sir," said he, with jaunty air; "and there is no one who more fully comprehends their whims and fancies than do I, to say nothing of their likes and dislikes. Yea," continued he boastfully, "I can say truthfully that I know more of women and their ways than does any living man of my years."

"And where gained you so vast a store of knowledge, young Solomon?"

"Why, in the boudoir, sir. Where else?"

With this he cocked his head on one side, and, releasing his foot from the stirrup, swung it with careless grace.

"In the boudoir?" quoth I, and plainly showing amusement.

"Yes; to be sure in the boudoir. With a sister, and

a twin sister at that, why should I not know much of the boudoir? What think you of my sister?" queried he suddenly.

Taken thus by surprise, I could find no words for the moment. Then boldly I made reply:

"Why, that she is as sweet and good and as true and womanly a maid as ever God fashioned."

"There you are mistaken, Sir Knight; and you do mightily amuse me by your estimate. Alec?" He threw up his head to laugh. "Why, she has the temper of a shrew! and is a little devil when the mood ——"

I raised my hand to stop him, glaring at him.

"Speak not so of your sister," I warned him, "else will I forget that you are her brother, and ——"

"Chastise me, I suppose," he finished, his eyes twinkling at me.

Now was I most amazed at the manner in which the lad had spoken, for I had more than once witnessed the devotion between the two. But when I took second glance at him, and noted the mischief agleam in his eyes, I knew he had been only baiting me. While I gazed at him, plainly showing my indignation, he yawned and put his gloved fingers to his lips.

" 'Twill be a fine day for me," continued he musingly, "when she weds with that handsome Huguenot lover of hers, Monsieur Raoul St. Julien, with whom she is madly in love; for then will I have a brother-in-law altogether to my liking." Suddenly he turned his head to give me quizzing glance. "And how like you Monsieur St. Julien, Master Ashton?"

Off my guard, hot resentment surging up in my heart at mention of the man to whom the woman I adored was affianced, I answered crustily, "I like him not."

He scanned my face for a moment, then broke into merry laughter.

"What find you so amusing in that?" I demanded, nettled by his manner.

He laughed again, and struck his riding boot with his crop.

"Of a truth, 'tis most amusing! And why such scowling countenance? I must ask. Now what has that amiable Huguenot, that courtly gentleman, done to you that you should so cordially dislike him?"

I made no reply to this, for greatly was I repenting of what I had already said.

We rode on some moments in silence. The forest had closed about us. From within the woodland depths came the flutter and stir of wild things, the gurgle of water as it lapped the shores of a creek, the sound of the wind sighing through the trees, like the distant murmur of ocean waves. The air was soft and balmy, with just a breath of the warmth of the coming summer in it.

I turned my head suddenly to surprise Clement's gaze fixed intently upon me, and never had I thought to see upon the face of a lad a look of such wistfulness and tenderness. Had his sister told him of the nature of the journey on which I was bound? And could he really care so much as to what might befall me?

As he caught my look, his eyes drooped and a deeper color dyed his cheeks. Then, with head upflung and a challenging glance at me, he broke forth into a rollicking bit of song, "Here's to Royal Charlie!"

Truly he sang it with charming grace, proving that he was gifted with voice like his sister, but with none so full and deep and divine as hers.

I had heard that the boy was an ardent Royalist, and would hear naught said against sovereign of the Stuart line without taking up the cudgel in defense. This was unlike his sister, who openly criticised both kings and queens when their conduct was not such as it should be.

Now was it high time that I took some action in the matter and sent this gay-hearted lad back upon his tracks; for never, if I could possibly prevent it, would I permit him to accompany me to Oaklands. For the smallest provocation, for the least interference on the lad's part, that black-hearted scoundrel, who awaited me at Oaklands, was none too good to turn on him and pink him, if he did no worse.

I drew rein, and checked my horse.

"Now, Clem, dear lad," I began, using his sister's name for him. But before I could utter another word, he stopped me.

"Hear me first," he urged, and now had all the lightness and swagger passed from him. His face had grown grave, and the eyes, he now turned full upon me, were so like his sister's in their earnestness and sweetness he might have borrowed them from her.

"My sister has told me of the nature of the journey on which you are bound. I have done the daring thing to ride after you, to add my entreaties to hers; to urge you not to persist in your determination to go on to Oaklands for encounter with the man who knows not so much as the first letter of the word honesty."

His earnestness touched me deeply.

"But, lad, it is honor that compels me to pursue my way. Were I to turn back now, he could brand me before men for my cowardice. For 'twas I who provoked the quarrel."

"Then meet him in some public place, with other men to witness. I tell you," his voice high-pitched, quivering, "if you go on to Oaklands, you will walk straight into a trap set for you. He may kill you!"

He swallowed hard, and his face paled.

"So your sister, too, feared for me," I told him.

Then with head proudly lifted, I added, "I flatter myself that I have some skill with the sword."

"But you know not the tricks he may have in store for you. Oh, I tell you there is danger! Young as I am I have read this man aright, despite all his fine poses. He is both knave and villain. Turn back now while yet there is time, I entreat you."

There was a mist of tears in his eyes as he thus plead with me. Truly was he a tender-hearted lad.

"Boy, I cannot. I must not. Apart from the settling of this quarrel between us, he has that in his possession which I must wrest from him."

He tossed his head somewhat pettishly.

"You are stubborn," said he.

"Perhaps so; but I must go on."

"Then I go with you."

"No! No! you must not! I forbid it."

He flashed me a look full of impudence and daring.

"I go where I please," said he haughtily; "and no man deters me."

With this he started his horse forward, and what else was there I could do save to follow?

We splashed through a creek, and on the other side a hare leapt from a clump of bushes and darted across the road from right to left.

Clement turned to regard me, smiling whimsically.

"Now there goes bad luck," said he; "and it must be for me, since I ride to the left."

It might have been Affra speaking.

"Then all the more reason why you should turn and go back," I told him sharply.

What was I to do with this stubborn lad? I could not put spurs to my horse and dash ahead, with the hope of eluding him; since his horse, as I well knew, was faster than mine.

He shook his head resolutely.

"All the more reason why I should go on; why I should be man enough to disregard all such foolish signs."

I had to give him due for the spirit he displayed, for his steadfast courage, for surely he must know the danger he courted by attaching himself to me.

The day was advancing. The sun's glow had deepened. All the earth was bathed in its gold. To our nostrils came the pungent scent of the pines and the heavy fragrance of bay blossoms. In the silence that had again fallen between us a squirrel barked from a near-by tree, and a crow flew above us, cawing raucously.

I took another furtive glance at my fine young lad. He was riding now with eyes downcast and a pensive look on his face. Oh, I must send him back, for truly would it break his sister's heart should any ill befall him.

I wheeled my horse suddenly and faced him, but before I could get out so much as the first words of what I intended to say, he flashed a smile at me, exclaiming:

"Oh, now have you at last turned sensible, and decided to go back!"

"Don't name me a coward," I told him sharply.

" 'Tis no cowardice to turn away from a trap that yawns before you," he replied as sharply; "for I tell you there is a trap awaiting you at Oaklands. Will you blindly walk into it?" These words he cried out in a high-pitched voice, but thrillingly sweet it was with his concern for me.

Yet I ignored his question and put all the sternness I could summon into my voice.

"I turned," said I, "not to go back, but to tell you I could now dispense with your company."

He eyed me steadily, his jaw set.

"I am here to ride with you to the journey's end," he announced firmly.

"Then the consequence be upon your head," I replied, losing patience.

"Be it so; and don't scowl in that devilish fashion. 'Tisn't pleasant to behold. I'm no white-feather, no lily-milk, if I am the darling of the boudoir. I can handle a sword in no mean fashion, I assure you, and there is no man living who has dared to call me a coward. And can't you see," he broke off with rollicking laugh, "that I am fair mad for adventure; that it is in my very veins to court danger on this morning, and all for the love of it?"

He drew sword and swung it jauntily, missing my nose by only an inch or so.

"Have a care," I told him; "for I am of no fancy to have my face slashed by awkward hand. Now art thou truly but a braggart," I added, hoping to provoke him to a quarrel, and thus have him leave me in the midst of it.

"Braggart dost thou call me and awkward with the sword?" said he, his chin held high, his red lips curled. "Have a care, sir, else will I challenge you and pink you at the first round."

"Ha! ha!" I laughed, still hoping to arouse him to anger, and force him to turn back. "Methinks those hands are more fitted to play with ladies' silken tresses than to handle the blade."

To my surprise he kept his temper, bowing mockingly as he replied:

"I do assure you I can do both and to some account. Come, dismount, and let me prove my words."

"I fight not with boys," I told him, and threw all the disdain I could into my voice.

He laughed boisterously, and slapped his thigh. Then, swinging his leg, he glanced down at it as though to admire its shape.

"Now by my faith!" he exclaimed, his head upflung, and casting me a mischievous glance, "do I know you for but a poor make-believe!"

At this I gave up the tilt of words with him, for I saw 'twas useless to strive further to be rid of him. And really the lad's determination to bear me company to Oaklands touched me deeply.

As we turned into the cross trail, he suddenly pressed his horse nearer to mine.

"If you are determined to go on," said he in a voice that thrilled me, so earnest it was, "pause long enough to pray for the wisdom to deal with treachery, for treachery it is that awaits you yon. That man is a fiend. He is capable of any evil."

His eyes closed for the moment as though he would shut something disturbing from his view, and, if I were not mistaken, there was a tremor of his shoulders.

Now more than ever did I wish that he had never followed me.

The path pierced the very heart of the forest thickly grown with the majestic oaks that so reminded me of my English home. The long streamers of gray moss, with which they were draped, swayed gracefully as the breeze ruffled them. There were also stately pines that outspread their feathery canopies far above us. Long brown needles of the past year's shedding carpeted the path.

When we passed out of the forest it was to see a low country of gleaming hillocks of white sand gold-drenched by the sun. But beyond there were wide vistas of cultivated fields, enclosed by the odd worm-like fences of the country, built of rails cut from the pines. On an

eminence in the midst of a grove we sighted the house. As we caught clearer view of it through an opening in the trees, I saw that, like Silk Hope, it was strongly built, almost fortress-like in appearance.

As we approached the great double gates of the main entrance, two little negroes came running to open them.

My lad tossed each a silver piece, saying, "That is to pay for the rabbit you didn't catch yesterday."

This bit of pleasantry they greeted with guffaws of delight as they bent to pick up the coins.

As we cantered up the avenue of beautiful oaks, the two pickaninnies scurried after us. By the time we reached the brick pillared portico, they were there to take our horses, each holding a stirrup for us to dismount, and each displaying two rows of glistening white teeth.

The great doors with their gleaming brass knobs stood wide open, as though hospitably inviting us to enter. Truly was this something of a princely home, where Langdon, alias Black Locks, took refuge between his piratical ventures.

A tall old black with snow-white hair, and with a manner as courtly as anything of the kind I had ever seen, conducted us into a hall of noble proportions. On the polished oaken floor were costly rugs. There were rich hangings of brocade, and lining the walls hunting and forest scenes in heavy, gilded frames.

"'Tis Cicero," said my lad at sight of the tall black. "How are you, Cicero?"

"Pretty fair, thank you, Marse Clem."

"And how's Chloe and all the grandchildren?"

"All fine an' hearty, thank you, suh."

"And is that minx, Prissie, still in love with the same man?"

"Yes, Marse Clem; they goin' marry soon."

"Then you can tell her she is due a wedding gift from me, for her constancy, if no more, the outrageous little vixen, playing fast and loose with every unfortunate young black who fell a victim to her wiles. My sister had her as maid, you know."

"Yes, Marse Clem, I tell her. She be mightily pleased to hear it."

"What! That I called her a vixen?"

"No, suh; but 'bout dat present you goin' give 'er."

"Is your master in?" I now queried.

"Yes, suh; him here; an' if you be Marse Ashton, he waitin' for you."

He opened a door as he spoke and announced us.

Langdon was sitting at a small table on which lay the remains of a meal. At his elbow were glasses and a decanter. He was lounging at his ease, a pipe between his teeth.

At sight of us, he raised himself slightly to cast me a sneering glance. His face was flushed from the wine he had been drinking, and never had I seen it with a more evil look.

"Ha!" he exclaimed; "so you are still anxious to depart for the Stygian shores?"

"I am here to call you to account for your rascality," I told him calmly, for I was determined he should not gain the advantage by arousing me to anger.

He made no reply to this, for by now his eye had lit upon young Clement.

"And Gad-zooks! what finely-feathered young strutting cock is this come to take care of you? Why, by Adam's bones! 'tis none other than that gay young rogue, Master Clement Hastings. Art looking for trouble, youngster, that you come meddling in quarrels?"

"I have come to see fair play for Master Ashton,"

said my lad boldly, his eyes fixed steadily upon Langdon's mocking face.

"And dared you to entertain such thought of me as that it would be otherwise than fair?" blazed Langdon. "Have a care as to your speech, my bantling, else will you feel the point of my sword though you be twenty times ward of His Excellency."

"Let the lad alone!" I flung at him. "He has naught to do with this matter. 'Tis between you and me solely."

"But still had you to bring him along as guardian," taunted he. " 'Tis most amusing to me."

He laughed sardonically, and took a pinch of snuff.

I felt the hot blood sting my cheeks, but I made no retort.

"What the devil did you pick this quarrel with me for, anyhow?" he flared.

"You know well enough. 'Tis utter folly such display of innocence. But before we begin in earnest, there is a demand I have to make of you."

"You can make as many as you damn please, for aught that I care!"

With this he reached for and lifted from the table a slender bottle of wine, and began deliberately to strip it of its wicker covering.

"Better have a gulp o' the wine," twitted he. " 'Twill steady your nerve, for I can see it's shaky."

He busied himself with glass and bottle.

I stood for some moments seeking to draw his gaze to me, but he kept it resolutely turned away.

Finally, aware that I was intently regarding him, he looked up, exclaiming impatiently:

"Why in Satan's name do you not come to the point and name the hare you would hunt?"

Still holding his gaze, I drew nearer to him.

"I want," said I, "those letters and other papers of

which you robbed me aboard the *Abigail and Anne.* Hand them over to me, Master Pirate Black Locks, and you can continue with a whole skin for aught I care."

At these words he sprang up with an oath, glaring at me, and never had I seen so much of evil pictured in a human face.

"Dare you again to name such name?" he thundered at me. "Rash fool! Have you no more care for your life than to make such foul accusations against me? Now will I surely run you through, whereas before 'twas my pleasure to only pink you. On guard!"

With this he turned and grasped the unsheathed blade lying on the table beside him.

I heard a little gasping cry from the lad and turned to reassure him.

"Have no fear for me," I told him. "I will soon convince this scoundrel that I am no child with the sword."

Whereas his cheeks had flushed at Langdon's mocking tones, they were now drained of all color. He walked slowly over to the mantel, and, propping his elbow upon it, stood there regarding us with eyes so like his sister's, it did disturb me mightily. Gone now was all that air of gay badinage that had so amused me as we had ridden hither. But the lad was no coward; I was convinced of this. 'Twas only, I was sure, his fear of the treachery of the scoundrel who now faced me, the evil light in his eyes deepening, as he cried out again, "On guard! Do you not hear?

"Ha!" sneered he, "have I at last convinced you it is death to draw with me, that you hesitate?"

His object, as was evident, was to prick me to anger, but I would not gratify him.

I measured him for a moment, but with not so much as the flicker of an eyelid.

"Now," continued he tauntingly, " 'tis with pleasure I make ready to send you on your journey."

Our blades rang together, and still did he keep up his taunting remarks.

"Ha! 'tis a poor show you make, as I supposed would be the case! God's wot, man, can you summon no more spirit? Are you half asleep? or is it that you fear? Why, 'tis but child's play to thrust with you. Lord! you turn my stomach. Now have I heard it said that to make a pup grow smart, first give him the pain of having his tail cut. Thus will I pink you, and deep enough to arouse what man there is in you."

He made thrust toward my shoulder, but, suspecting the feint, I caught and turned his blade aside as it flashed straight at my breast.

We thrust and parried for some moments. In his evil eyes I could plainly see the lust for my blood. The light they emitted was like the flashings of lightning from a black gulf. And for the first time did a doubt of the outcome creep into my mind. The scoundrel was a consummate swordsman, as I had reason to know, for he had convinced me of his skill in that encounter on the green. Now, as was plain to me, he had a different manner with the sword, a more vicious handling of the blade, with no regard for the rules of the game. His arm too, as I shortly discovered, was a degree stronger than mine and his wrist a bit more seasoned. No doubt he had had ample opportunity to keep in trim in the pursuit of his black calling, while I had lost through the lack of practice.

My one hope was to withstand his thrusts till I had tired him out. He was much fleshier than I; he had been drinking heavily, as was apparent; his cheeks were flabby with the marks of gross living, and already he had begun to breathe heavily.

I think he read what was in my mind, for at the very moment I began to feel hopeful, his foot went out against my leg. I felt myself slipping. Now all was over, I realized, for the scoundrel had deliberately tripped me.

I saw the flashing of his blade as it darted toward me with murderous intent. But ere it reached me, there was the clang of an intervening blade that threw his upward. Agile as a cat, my lad had sprung forward to thwart the villain in his devilish design.

I know not how it happened; it was all over so quickly. As it was thrown upward, Langdon's weapon glanced aside, its point slashing my lad's coat at the shoulder and inflicting a wound that soon brought the blood trickling.

I sprang up, anger fair consuming me.

"Devil! Fiend incarnate!" I cried; "you'll answer to me for this."

"Better look to the lad," he sneered; "he's about to faint, I think. Devil take him for his meddling!"

Clement had staggered back, grasping the edge of the table. He had gone deathly white; his eyes were closed, and he was swaying as though he would fall. Meanwhile the trickle of blood had widened the stain upon the fine green coat with its silver buttons. I sprang and caught him in my arms, placing him in a chair.

"If you have so much as an ounce of humanity in you," I cried to Langdon, "bring water and cloths."

But he stood staring at us; for by now I had ripped open my lad's coat and the bosom of his shirt. As I did so, I started back with sharp exclamation, the room reeling around me.

"God's life!" cried out Langdon. "A woman! Not that roistering braggart, Master Clement, but coy Mis-

tress Alecia herself, and none other. Zounds! what witch's broth of scandal is this?"

"Go! bring water and cloths!" I thundered at him, "and keep your vile gaze away."

I was doing all I could meanwhile to staunch the flow of blood with my handkerchief; but my heart was beating so, I could scarcely control my hands.

Suddenly her eyes opened, and a trembling seized her. As her gaze met mine the blood poured into her cheeks. She covered her face with her hands as she cried out, "Oh, I think I must be mad to have done this! Oh, I am ashamed! ashamed! and most unhappy!" With this she broke into a passionate fit of sobbing.

Now could I control myself no longer. I fell upon my knees beside her. I took her hands in mine and pressed them to my heart.

"Sweet Mistress!" I cried; "you risked your life for me;" and then and there I poured out all the pent-up love of my heart. Growing bolder still, because she in nowise made move to stay me, my lips sought the sweet trembling mouth and clung there.

Now did she open her eyes and look at me, and what I saw there set my heart to racing madly.

"Mark! oh Mark!" she cried. Then with a little gasp of joy her arms were lifted and went around my neck, and her face was pressed to mine.

I know not how long we would have clung there in this sweet madness that possessed us, had not Langdon's gruff voice at my elbow intervened, as he stood there proffering basin and cloths.

"Have done with that sickening billing and cooing," said he, "and look to that wound, unless you want her to have serious trouble from it."

I faced him with flashing eyes as I took the basin from him.

"You are to keep your foul mouth shut with reference to this," I warned him.

"I speak what I please," he flung at me as he turned and left the room.

Now, when I had finished cleansing and binding the wound, with my sweet one's face all the while turned aside, rosy-red from embarrassment, and had satisfied myself that the wound was not so deep as I had feared, then did I go all atremble at what I had done. I, who up to this time had made proud boast to myself that honor at least was left to me, had now lost all claim to it by the madness of revealing my love to a woman affianced to another man! And how dared I think that all those sweet yieldings, the soft fire of her eyes meant that my love was returned? 'Twas no more, I now felt, than the outcome of a woman's hysterical condition because of a piteous situation, her gratitude for the presence of one on whom she could rely.

"Sweet Mistress," I began; and it seemed to me at that moment that I could never again get free use of my stammering tongue; "I—I beg that you will forgive me; that you will pity my weakness in that—that I so far forgot your relation to St. Julien as to—to ——"

But here a silvery burst of laughter greeted my words, and I glanced around to see her regarding me with twinkling eyes.

"Dear me! dear me!" said she banteringly; "how many sorts of a wooden head have we here?"

And still was I dolt enough not to understand. And still stared I at her.

"Stupid!" exclaimed she; and again, "Stupid! Oh! now do I know of a truth that never was there bat so blind as one that will not see!"

"But, Mistress," I faltered; "Monsieur St. Julien; he who—who ——"

"Yes, Monsieur St. Julien; poor, poor Monsieur St. Julien!" mocked she. "What of Monsieur St. Julien, Master Mark Ashton?"

Then as her face went rosy red and the long silken lashes drooped upon her cheeks, I heard words that revealed to my opened eyes all the beauty of the world and the glory thereof:

"Oh, Mark! Mark! you stupid. There never has been anyone but you from the beginning!"

CHAPTER XVIII

WE HAVE BATTLE WITH THE RED FIENDS

How Mistress Alecia managed to reach her room unobserved I had no way of knowing. Of a truth, was I beginning to fast realize that of the resourcefulness of women I knew next to nothing. How she also managed to keep secret from all save the sharp-eyed little maid, Affra, the matter of the wounded shoulder, I know not. To my joy the wound healed rapidly. As to Langdon, though several days had passed, there was still no indication that his tongue had wagged. For this at least I felt grateful to him.

Yet there was trouble enough for us; for, as I had feared, the Governor was not at all pleased by the turn of affairs. Very quickly had he given me to understand that as a suitor for the hand of his ward, Mistress Alecia Hastings, I was not at all desirable until my father had been heard from and the matter of my identity fully cleared up. A piece of information at the same time he had given me that was like a nettle in the flesh. Mistress Alecia was considerable of an heiress through the legacy of an uncle whose favorite she had been.

Now, this was truly galling; to be placed in the light of a fortune-hunter. First adventurer; now fortune-hunter! I could not believe that the Governor himself thought so meanly of me. It was only right that he should be cautious, for I had to admit that circumstances were mightily against me. Thus, while Alecia herself took all this to mock at, and sought to cheer me by the sweet proofs of her love and constancy, yet did I suffer at times much bitterness of spirit. Deeper would have

been the gloom that enshrouded me could I then have had the knowledge that the vessel taking the communication to my father had gone down at sea.

All the while that I had been at Silk Hope the Governor had made every effort to fulfill his promise to me, to aid me in locating my brother. Letters had been written to men in various sections of the Province, and he had sent Indian runners into the Indian country; but as yet no word of encouragement had come.

I had the deepest pity for the Governor at this time, yet did I also feel obliged to condemn his vacillation. There had been no official step taken with reference to the Queen's act concerning the Church law; and he was being assailed on all sides with the accusation that he was dilly-dallying, hoping to persuade the Queen to reconsider. I, for one, knew this to be true, for I had, at his dictation, written the letters in which he had plead with Her Majesty for the time in which to place before her more clearly justification of the course Granville and he had taken.

"I am an old man, past my seventieth year," he had written; "and weakened by my infirmities; yet have I striven faithfully to serve Your Majesty's interests in this Colony. I have been loyal to my trust, whatever else may be said of me. And now do I beg Your Majesty's indulgence while I endeavor to make clear to you that, in the prevailing conditions, the Church law is the one means by which men may be brought under restraint and the prosperity of the Colony insured. An established religion is not only necessary to the support of the Civil Government, but also necessary for the spiritual good of the governed."

The days had sped by, and now the heat of the summer was over all the land. The sun rose with a dazzling brilliance each morning, and by noon its rays

were beating down upon the earth with the intensity of the breath of a furnace. Clement Hastings had gone to Barbadoes on a mission connected with his father's estate.

Some two miles from Silk Hope House, on the public highway, was a tavern known as the Red Deer Inn. I was in the habit of visiting it occasionally, for there I now and again met men it was a pleasure to know.

The host of the tavern was one Jason Allen, a kindly soul, who took no part in the discussion; but I suspected him of being on the side of the Dissenters.

At the Red Deer I had also met men coming from the interior; traders chiefly, but men too, who were mere adventurers, lured by the stories that had come to them of gold hidden in the mountains. Not one as yet had found the wealth for which he had risked his life, but each had come back with the same amazing story of a mysterious white man, who for years had dwelt among the Indians and who ruled as a king. Even the hostile chiefs feared and obeyed him; while the people he governed worshipped him as a god.

A rain was falling this afternoon as I made my way to the Red Deer. I was likely to find a goodly company there come in out of the weather. The rain had cooled the atmosphere considerably; and as I went on there came to me the drenched odor of the pines and other woodsy scents; the pungent smell of the wet earth.

The Inn was a long, rambling story-and-a-half building, with overspreading gables and the wooden figure of a deer, glistening with red paint, hanging from the lintel.

I had no sooner entered than I became aware that there was some matter of very grave import under discussion. A group of men was assembled about a table on which were glasses and a decanter of wine. They were

all known to me but two. These two had the appearance of having come in from a long, hard journey. They were either cattle drovers or traders with the Indians, I quickly inferred; and as I joined the group I learned that the latter surmise was correct.

The men were Samuel Brace and James Masterman. Of the other four, one was Sir John Coming; another Monsieur Jean St. Julien, father of Raoul; and Captain Cantey and Major Popple.

"Come over and join us in the wine," said Sir John heartily to me. " 'Tis none other than the fine scuppernong the Governor himself makes. He has sent two flagons of it to the Inn with his compliments. If I mistake not, 'tis a brand that is going to make this Province famed abroad.

"The Governor has shown himself to be a man of marked ability in developing the resources of the Colony," he continued warmly. "There has been wonderful advance through his efforts both in agriculture and commerce."

"But a man of no ability whatever in reconciling the different factions of the Colony, in bringing harmony out of chaos," growled the Major. "In fact, he has been a magnificent success as a breeder of strife; a man blinded by his own arrogance. Why the devil is he delaying now?" he blazed out. "Why doesn't he take action with reference to the Church law and end the suspense?"

"I hear he is waiting in the hope that the Queen will reconsider," remarked Monsieur St. Julien somewhat mildly.

"Yes, that's it, and naught else. The devil take him for his blinded bigotry, and consummate egotism! Does not he know, can he not see whither his dilly-dallying, his playing with fire is leading? And now here is this

new peril at our very doors, and still he continues to act as if this one effort to wheedle the Queen into the support of Granville and himself was the mightiest issue at stake under God's Heavens."

"You are too scathing in your denunciation, Major," Captain Cantey reproved. "I am satisfied that, when the Governor hears what Brace and Masterman have to tell of the alarming conditions, he will act instantly."

"I can't agree with you, sir, that the Governor will take action at once in the matter. God, man, haven't you discovered ere this that he is of that fanatical breed that would fight for the Church before he would for Queen or country?"

"That is treason, sir," reprimanded Sir John.

" 'Tis truth, not treason, and so it stands."

"The Governor is a staunch Churchman," interposed Monsieur St. Julien mildly. "We can excuse much on that score."

Now did I learn of the disquieting news the traders had brought. Spanish agents had been in the Indian towns; and there were unmistakable signs that at least two or three of the tribes were preparing for an attack on the English settlements. The Yemassees, especially, the most powerful of all the tribes, had assumed a most threatening attitude. In fact, bands of the Indians in their war paint had been seen skulking near the settlements.

"It is those Spanish fiends at St. Augustine who are responsible for it all," remarked Samuel Brace sharply. "They are doing everything they can, to keep the fire of hatred of the English aflame in the breasts of our red foes."

"And if they do succeed in arousing the savages to fall upon the settlements, God help us all," said James Masterman. "Of all peoples, the Spaniard is the most

inhuman, more cruel even than the savage. They have no more compassion than the devils of hell. God help our women and children if those fiends lead the attack upon the settlements."

It was now high time that the Governor be informed of the disturbing news brought by the two traders. I started off at once to carry the news to him.

Not an instant did he delay in the preparations for defense. Whatever weakness he may have shown in conducting the civil affairs of the Province, he was the matchless soldier when it came to the question of military protection.

Runners were sent in various directions to notify the settlers, and to warn those in the more remote sections to hasten to the protection of the better fortified places. Detachments of the neighborhood militia were placed on guard and scout duty; while the remaining men were held in readiness for instant action. But the days went on, and there was no sign of warlike movement on the part of the Indians. Apparently the attempt of the Spaniards to incite the Indians to an attack upon the settlements had failed. Thus were we lulled into a feeling of security.

All this while, as I had heard and seen nothing of Langdon, I was speculating as to where he was and what he was doing. Off on one of his piratical cruises, no doubt; or else plotting with his allies, the red fiends, for the destruction of the Colony. For that he did so plot was I still unshaken in my belief.

It was late afternoon and there was an air of brooding peace over all the land. The gables, roofs, and chimneys of the fine old house were all aglow in the westering sun; which seemed more than ever lavish with its gold, flooding trees and lawns. There was a soothing, satisfying

sound to the breeze as it rustled the foliage of the Pride of India trees. All the warm scents of the bourgeoned summer greeted the nostrils.

Alec was in the garden, gathering flowers, and singing a madrigal in French, the sweet voice ringing out in rivalry with the lilting of the mock-birds in the oak boughs.

"Fair Mistress," said I, as I approached her, my hand upon my heart, "have I your permission to enter your enchanted garden?"

She smiled at me archly, her brown eyes all atwinkle. The face uplifted to greet me with the light upon it was like a flower the sun woos. The sight of it fair turned my heart over. Was ever man since Adam's day more ardently in love than I was?

"You should tremble with fear, sir, to dare such a thing," said she, "since in this garden dwells the fiercest of dragons."

"I fear not the dragon," declared I boldly, "since I know his name. 'Tis Love, and none other."

"For shame, sir, to call Love a dragon."

"Is he not, sweet Mistress, since he does drag on men's hearts to draw them to the feet of their adored ones?"

With this I boldly took seat beside her, and, drawing the sweet face to mine, kissed her not once, but twice.

She went rosy-red; and her eyes flashed as she reproved me.

"Remember you not, sir, there may be eyes looking on?"

"I care not, sweetheart, if there be a hundred such."

Then, because her glance had sent my heart into a tumult, and because I could think of nothing else at the moment to say, I queried, looking down upon the flowers in her lap:

"Have been gathering flowers, sweet Mistress?"

"Dullard!" exclaimed she, with a ripple of laughter, "to sit there, with your eyes on the flowers, and make such query."

"Dullard I am, sweet one, I do most humbly admit it."

"That sounds not like a man, and I am of the opinion, sir, that it is but a show of assumed modesty. Certes!" continued she, her chin uptilted, "of what monstrous conceit is man! Ever he thinks he knows best in all things. Puny indeed beside his colossal wisdom is that which he grants to woman."

"Yet what a puny thing is man's wisdom, fair Mistress, when it seeks for a clear understanding of the ways and wiles of woman!"

Thus we chaffed and bantered each other; saying, too, all manner of sweet and light-hearted things, as we sat there amid the fragrance of the garden, with its vistas of flowering plants, and beyond these fruitful orchards; and farther away still the walls of the forest luminous in a mist of gold. Her hand soft and warm, lay in mine; every pulse beat was athrob with her nearness. Of what she was thinking when her sweet lips were not framing words, I could but guess. That her thoughts were like mine, of the radiant future, when our love had been crowned by the happiness of wedded life, I held the fond belief.

'Twas while we sat thus that Affra came to us, full of chatter like the magpie she was.

"Oh, Alec," she began, "what do you think? I have found out all about that new face wash Mistress Rose has been brewing, and which she was told was so much better than the old one of rose-leaves, honey and dew. Mistress Rose tried to keep it a secret, but I have found it out, and now I'll tell it to you, Alec."

"Think you I need a new face wash, chit?" was the bantering query. Then the tone changing, she demanded sharply, "Have you been snooping around Mistress Rose, Affra, when I so plainly forbade it?"

Affra hung her head for a moment; then she lifted it bravely:

"Yes, sister, I have. 'Twas just as mean as could be of Mistress Rose to seek to keep it a secret. It was all because she did not want you to know, and I was determined you should. Now will I tell it to you, Alec; and I don't care one bit what Mistress Rose thinks. She's as hateful as can be."

"No more such words, Affra, remember. They are not only unkind, but most unbecoming in a little lady like you."

"But now must I tell you of the face wash, sister."

"Some other time, dear." Then with a lilt of laughter, "Think you my face needs washing? If so, there is plenty of clear, sweet water at hand."

Affra lingered, reproaching her sister for her lack of enthusiasm over the new face wash, which she had been at such trouble to discover; with much chatter on other subjects, then strolled away.

All the western sky was a sea of gold in which many ships sailed to and fro, tall of masts and deep of prow, like the quaint craft of the bold navigators of old.

To us came many sounds and sights of preparations for the approaching night. Spiral columns of smoke were floating upward from the negro cabins, signs of the evening meal in progress. From the fields came bursts of song as the laborers quitted their tasks to wend their way homeward. Pickaninnies were driving in the cows for the night, and others the ducks and geese.

Up the path from the silk-house I saw the Governor approaching, walking slowly, yet with shoulders erect

despite his years. His head was bent down as that of one in deep abstraction. I could well surmise that his thoughts were not of pleasant subjects. I had noted within the past few days how his face had become more deeply lined than ever.

It was even as I watched his approach that there came sounds of such a nature as brought me instantly to my feet. An outburst of piercing noises had split the serenity of the peaceful evening; hoarse calls, the outcries of men, the screams of women, the wailing of children, and above all, fiendish shouts and the rattle of musketry.

"Oh, what is it?" Alice queried in alarm as she sprang up, clutching my sleeve.

I put my arm around her.

"I will find out at once," I told her; but even as I spoke, I knew.

I sprang away, and, as I ran, I was conscious that she followed me. I turned about to entreat:

"Go back, dear heart, go back! Quick! To the shelter of the house!"

Her piercing cry answered me:

"Affra! She is somewhere there about the negro quarters. I saw her go but a short while agone."

"Then I will find her. But go back, sweetheart, I again beg of you."

"No! no! no! I must go with you!"

The Governor was now calling to me with sharp insistence. He gave me hurried directions as I reached him.

" 'Tis the Indian attack at last," said he, "but I hope not to the extent we feared. Start the negroes at the quarters to the house as quickly as you can; and get messages to Mullins and the other overseers to arm every available man with the muskets and ammunition in the nearest rice mill. Arm yourself first from the store in

the weaving-room. If only now some of the militia are near at hand! For that I am praying."

With this he hurried toward the house, seeking to calm the panic, and issuing orders as he went.

The din had increased. It sounded now like all hell broke loose.

I was no more than half-way to the weaving-room, when, through an opening in the trees, I saw that which brought me up sharply, all atremble from head to foot. At the same time I knew from sounds she made that Alec, too, had seen.

Just beyond the last row of negro cabins, across a corner of an abandoned field, Affra was running at high speed, and coming on behind her, with a swiftness that gained upon her every second, were two of the red devils, with hideously painted faces, their battle-axes uplifted in readiness for the blow when the child was overtaken.

I did not wait to seek the gate to the mulberry grove, but went over the fence. I was barely over when Alec, too, took it gallantly.

"My God!" I heard her exclaim as she caught up with me. "Oh, my God! we shall be too late! And you, Mark, haven't even a weapon."

Then as we ran on, I heard words of prayer issuing from her lips.

Even as I sped forward, with sight and thought intent upon that one spot, to reach which in time I felt I would gladly give my life, I became conscious of a struggle going on some distance to the right of us. White and black and red men were in fierce combat. Jonathan Mullins had not waited to be told what to do. Oh, if only I held in my hands at this moment one of those good trusty muskets, the roar of which was now coming to me!

The frantic black people were pouring out of their cabins and scurrying from point to point, aimlessly like frightened hares; screaming, wringing their hands. I called to them sharply again and again; urging them to the shelter of the great house.

"Mark! oh, Mark!" I heard Alec cry out gaspingly. "We'll never do it in time! Oh! Affra, my darling! my darling!"

The anguished cry reached the child. It acted as a spur. At the very moment that it seemed all was over, when the foremost of the red devils had poised his axe for the fatal blow, Affra swerved aside, then sprung forward with the leap of a deer.

Now caught I sight of an object that caused my heart to bound with joy. 'Twas a good stout brick. With all the need for haste I took careful aim. It struck the foremost of the red devils full upon the breast. He staggered, the hideous battle-axe falling from his grip. Then he went crashing to earth and lay prone. Almost at the same moment a musket spoke from one of the cabins, and the second of the red fiends threw up his hands, went down in a huddled heap, and lay still.

Affra was in her sister's arms, and they were sobbing together.

"Oh, how could you?" Alec's voice was raised reproachfully. "How could you be so thoughtless? How could you take such risk as to wander off to the fields alone, when Sir Nathaniel had warned us again and again of the danger?"

"Oh, Alec, I did not intend to disobey. I came only to the quarters, to see Aunt Betsey. But, sister—oh, have you not guessed?" Here her voice rang out, and her head was proudly lifted. "Why, it was I who first saw the Indians creeping through the bushes, and ran to tell Jonathan."

"Oh, you brave, brave little thing you!" and now was she fair smothered with kisses.

As I gazed about me I saw to my satisfaction that the frightened negroes had sought the protection of the house, and I was speculating as to the shot that had come from one of the cabins, when I heard Affra cry out. It was at the moment that we had turned to make haste ourselves to the house, since the sounds from the fields had grown more alarming.

"Oh, look! look!" Affra was exclaiming, and the fright in her voice was unmistakable.

Alec and I turned simultaneously, and each instantly saw the peril hastening down upon us. Two bands of the Indians had broken through the lines of the defenders and were speeding directly toward the quarters, each from an almost opposite direction.

"There's naught to do but to run for it!" cried Alec, catching Affra by the arm. "My God! how fast they are coming!"

My first impulse like hers had been to make all speed toward the house; but quickly I saw the rashness of such attempt. We would be overtaken and slaughtered before we were half-way.

"To one of the cabins!" I cried out sharply.

I caught each by an arm and we sped toward the cabin from which I was almost sure the musket fire had come.

We were but a few paces away, when the door was flung open, and we had no more than gained the inside and the door had been closed, when two of the Indians, who had outstripped the others, flung themselves against it with the most blood-curdling cries that ever I had heard from human throats.

There were three people in the cabin; an old woman huddled in a low chair beside the hearth, a boy, evidently sick, who lay on a pallet; and the man who had

opened the door for us. He it was, I was now sure, who had fired the shot that had laid the second Indian low; for the musket was still in his hand.

"Have you other weapon?" I queried, "and ammunition?"

"Yes, Massa; ober dere in de corner," he directed me.

There were a half dozen muskets and quite a store of ammunition; and now I realized that this must be one of the two cabins the Governor had prepared against the Indian attack.

The old woman and the boy had been unable to escape, and the man would not desert them.

All this while those red devils, their number increased, were seeking to force the door, yelling fiendishly.

The cabin was of stout logs, chinked with a mortar that had hardened like stone. There were two doors and three windows; two of the latter at the front and one at the back; each heavily shuttered. At intervals between the logs were portholes.

The door was now trembling under the fierce onslaught. Fortunately it was of stout oak and strongly barred.

I took aim through one of the portholes and fired. There was a yell of agony as the human mass swayed back and one of the red men fell. Before they could form for a renewed attack, the old man's musket had brought down another.

"I fight with you," said a low, firm voice at my side, and Alec stood there, musket in hand, and preparing to fire.

"No! No!" I cried out as I took the musket from her. " 'Tis a clumsy weapon and kicks hard. Load for us, dear heart. That will help the more."

The old man and I fired simultaneously, and from the

yells of pain that greeted the shots we knew that each ball had found its mark, but whether with fatal effect or otherwise, we could not tell, because of the smoke that all but blinded us.

But now came sounds more ominous than any we had yet heard, the chopping of axes into the wood.

A splintered opening appeared in the door, and a hand was thrust through, seeking the bar. I brought the butt of my musket down upon it with all the force I could summon. There was a scream of agony as the hand was withdrawn, crushed and bleeding. At the same instant a shot from the inside was fired through the opening, and there came another shriek of pain.

I heard a gasping sound as a body fell against me. It was Alec who had fired, and now staggered back from the recoil. Her cheeks were blanched but her eyes were on fire.

"I must—must fight with you," she said, her head flung up, "for do you not see 'tis for our lives? Oliver is loading."

I turned my head swiftly to see the sick boy, whom I now recognized as one of the house servants, sitting upon his pallet and busy with a musket. Beside him was Affra, who had brought him balls and powder, and who was now waiting to fetch us the muskets as fast as loaded, brave little maid that she was!

There had been for a space a surcease of the sounds without, and I wondered what was going to happen. In the silence I caught the whimpering cries of the old woman beside the hearth, and heard Affra speaking to her soothingly and encouragingly.

I was about to do the rash thing of peering out through the splintered opening in the door, when an arrow came whizzing through, missing my face by just an inch or so. A second one swiftly followed. I heard

Alec's sharp cry as she dragged me back. Both arrows had lodged in the logs of the opposite wall.

Simultaneously with the cry from Alec I heard Affra calling to me sharply. "Oh, Master Ashton! Master Ashton! they are around by the back door, and they have a log to break it in with!"

"Stand here to guard the opening," I said to the old man. "I will see to the rear door."

"To the lof', Massa," he urged me. "It the bes' place."

"I go with you," spoke Alecia, her lips gripped, a musket in her hand. "Nay, Mark, you shall not send me back! If die we must, then we die together; for I am yours, dearest, not only for this world, but for eternity."

How divinely sweet and adorable she was at that moment with the love glow in her brown eyes!

I caught and held her to me. "Forever and forever, beloved," I said as my lips sought hers.

As I reached the loft and peered out cautiously, I saw a score or more of the red fiends congregated but a few feet away, and grasping between them the half of a pine log, from the other half of which rails, lying near, had been split.

I saw something else, too, in that one searching glance. The defenders were falling back from the fields, closely pursued, as it seemed. They were near enough now for me to make out forms clearly, despite that the sun had set and twilight was gathering.

One form stood out distinctly among the others, conspicuous because of its height and the peculiar grace of its movements even in the midst of combat.

'Twas Langdon, and surrounding him a group of Indians, obeying his commands, and fighting like the devils they were. Now at last had he, the arch fiend and

traitor, shown the cloven foot. He it was, beyond doubt, who had led the red devils, his allies, in the attack upon Silk Hope, as I had been sure all along he would do. What further evidence of his perfidy was needed?

The Indians grasping the log were now swaying from side to side and advancing toward the door. I took aim, and as the smoke cleared, I saw that one had fallen. Instantly there was a second shot, and another tumbled to earth.

'Twas Alec who had fired the second shot, and again the recoil of her gun sent her staggering back, white and faint.

"This will never do, dear one," I told her. "You can't stand any more of it. Load for me."

"I must help with the firing," said she. "One musket can never hold back that wicked horde. Give me back the gun, Mark."

The glow in her eyes as she turned toward me, the white calm of her face, the dauntless lift of her head, sent the blood leaping through my veins. What a woman she was! And she was mine!

"But one of us must load, darling; and better you."

Though two of the savages had fallen, with yells of rage, the others came on. I heard the crashing of the log against the door; and though I fired again and again, each time to be greeted by a yell of pain, the sounds of the hammering against the door kept on.

All the savages, it seemed, had congregated on this side of the cabin, for I now heard the old man firing from one of the rear portholes.

The savages, I feared, would make quick work of the rear door, as the hasty glance I had given it had shown me that it was not so stout as the one at the front.

The smoke from the musket fire had become stifling. We were now gasping and choking from it. My eyes

were smarting and watering to the extent that I could not see clearly to take aim.

It was while I was lifting the musket in preparation to fire, that an arrow came speeding through the loophole and tore through my sleeve, bringing the blood.

"Oh, you are wounded!" Alec cried out sharply as she caught my arm.

"Only a scratch," I assured her.

Additional sounds were now coming from without, that of the chopping of axes against the rear window shutter. The din, too, had increased. It sounded as though all the demons of hell were holding a jubilee. For the first time, I saw an agony of fear in Alec's eyes. As I spoke to her, to reassure her, she fell against me, sobbing brokenly. Her splendid nerve had given way at last. And no wonder! The blood-curdling yells of those red devils were sending an icy current through my own veins.

It was while we stood thus, with my arms around her, that there came to us sounds that caused both our heads to go up swiftly. The noises were coming from the direction of the mulberry grove, shouts, commands, and the discharge of musketry.

Alec broke away from me with a little exultant cry.

"Oh, we are saved! saved! They are coming to our aid from the house!"

The words were no more than uttered when there came other sounds that struck terror to our hearts. There was an impact of the log against the door of such force as to shake the loft. Then the rending of wood, the crash of the door as it fell, and a scream from Affra.

"Oh!" Alec cried out; "they have broken in, and the child is in danger."

We went down the ladder as swiftly as it was possible. The room was now lighted by flames from the

hearth, where a fire had leapt up. We were no more than within the room below, when the window shutter, too, was torn away, and a savage leapt through the opening.

Some of that which took place from then on is like a blur in the memory; but there are other scenes and sounds connected with that raging hell that I will carry with me indelibly to the day of my death.

I saw the savage leap through the window and make toward the old woman, his axe upraised. But the old man was too quick for him. He swung his musket and brought its butt down upon the befeathered head. The sound was like the cracking of egg-shells. I saw Affra running toward us and heard her crying out, "The front door! The front door! Sir Nathaniel and the black men from the house are out there! Open it quick!"

I saw, too, the savage horde pressing through the rear door; and yelling like the demons they were; and the sick boy struggle up from his pallet and stagger toward us. I heard the shouts of the rescuers at the door. I saw Alec, instead of turning in that direction, speed across the floor and put an arm around the swaying boy. I followed her, crying out to her to come back. I put out a hand to grasp her arm. There came a warning shout, a scream from Alec, and the next moment something descended upon my head with crushing force. I reeled, with the blackness of death engulfing me, and knew no more.

CHAPTER XIX

I GO A PERILOUS WAY ON LOVE'S QUEST

THERE followed a time of terrifying illusions; of wild phantasmagoria; during which I was fighting hand to hand with the Indians; or plunging over precipices, down, down into a pit of black horrors. Over and over I heard Alec's cry of agony, saw her holding out entreating hands to me; struggled to reach her, to cross the yawning chasm that lay between us; but each time was held back by demon hands.

Again it was as though a black curtain was suddenly let down between us; changing swiftly to a fiery red; the flames of which consumed us. All the while there was that tremendous beating in my head, as though all the blood in my body had centered there, and was pounding madly for release.

Brief periods of semi-consciousness came, during which I felt kind hands ministering to me; heard words of pity; felt something soothing upon my forehead; and each time that I so returned in a half-dazed way to consciousness, I heard also someone crying beside me. There it was now, that piteous sobbing, as I opened my eyes and gazed about me.

It was Madam Johnson who stood beside me. She it was who had been ministering to me. There were kindliness and concern in her countenance that touched my heart. I knew her to be a woman of much gentleness of character, but had not thought she would concern herself with me.

I had opened my eyes but briefly; and in that moment she had been speaking to someone. I caught the words in a vague way:

"Unless you control yourself, dear, you cannot stay. Remember what has been told you."

It was Affra's voice that replied:

"Oh! Madam, I promise. I promise you I will do as you wish. Only let me stay."

The room was very quiet now. I strove to open my eyes again; but for weakness could not. Affra, my little sweetheart, was there beside me, and for some reason was in trouble. I must speak to her. I must try to comfort her. But my voice, like my eyes, refused for a time to do my will.

I moved my hand on the coverlet. Instantly it was clasped by one soft, warm, and quickly caressing. And again there broke forth that hysterical sobbing.

I had my eyes open at last. My voice, too, was at my command, but when I spoke it was barely above a whisper.

"Affra, little sweetheart, what is it? Why are you crying?"

"Oh!" she cried out sharply; and again, "Oh! Oh!" and buried her head in the pillow beside mine.

I tried to raise my hand, to caress the bright head, but it fell back again weakly.

Her head was lifted now, and she was looking at me, her crying under control. Her eyes, usually so blithesome and bonnie, were red from weeping; her face flushed and streaked with tears. She caught my hand and pressed it against her.

"Oh!" she quavered, "I—I thought you would never, never open your eyes again! That you were going to—to ——"

"Die?" I finished for her. "But you see I haven't, dear one. Then why not look happy and smile a little?"

Her lips began to quiver; her eyes quickly filled, and she turned her head away.

"Oh! I can't! I can't!" she cried out; "because—because ——"

Then to my amazement, she dropped my hand, and ran from the room, her hand pressed to her mouth. It was three days ere I saw her again.

I was sitting up by then, propped in bed. I had even tottered over to a chair beside the window and sat there for a time. But that was just on this third day since I had seen Affra; and I was wondering how long it would be ere I dared again to make the attempt.

My wound, I could feel, was healing. For the last day or so there hadn't been any of the intense pain I had previously suffered. It had daily, as I had learned, received the attention of the plantation physician.

I had also in the meantime had the very best of care. Delicacies were brought to me at every meal. The Governor, Madam Johnson, Madam Broughton, the good dominie, Reverend Thomas; even Mullins, the overseer, had all visited me—Madam Ball had gone home. And twice, to my great astonishment, Mistress Rose had come into the room long enough to ask gently how I was faring. Gone entirely was the look of haughtiness to which I had grown used. Instead there was about her an air as of a sorrow she was trying bravely to subdue. Had any ill befallen Langdon? I wondered.

Yet never once in all this time had come the one of all others for whom my heart cried out; for whose voice and footsteps my ears were constantly strained. What could be the meaning of it? I marveled. Alec, my beloved, the woman to whom was given every throb of my heart, to so neglect me! To show such indifference! It was incredible! What could be the meaning of it? When I sought to ask questions, to pierce the veil of mystery, I was told that I must not yet try to talk. No one would answer, even when I persisted in making query.

It was maddening. Why would they not answer? Then suddenly I understood. It was like a great black wave engulfing me. Why had I not seen before? The agony of that cry! Could I ever forget it? Alec, too, had been hurt. Those red fiends had struck her down. She had not come to me for the reason that she could not. And they had not told me that she, too, had been stricken, for fear of its effect on me in my weakness.

How badly was she hurt? How greatly was she suffering? What had those demons done to her? The questions seared my brain like fire. There would be no peace for me till I knew. They must, they should tell me, and end this maddening suspense. I would have it from the very next one who visited me.

It was Peter, one of the house boys, who became the victim. He had brought me my dinner. I smiled with satisfaction at the thought that Peter would make my task easy. I would either succeed in persuading him to tell me, or win the information by strategy.

"Peter," I began, catching his glance and holding it, "where is Mistress Alecia? Why does she not come to see me as do the others?"

Peter remained silent. "Will you not tell me?" I coaxed. "Peter, what has happened to Mistress Alecia?"

Peter continued to stare, his eyes bulging. Then he spoke, "Gov'ner him say me not to talk."

"But you've got to tell me," I threatened him, for I was upset by his stubbornness.

"Me no talk," repeated Peter. "Missus, too, say Peter no talk. Peter get beatin' if him talk."

Before I could either persuade or threaten again, he was leaving the room. In vain I ordered him to come back.

The silence of them all; the mystery was beyond en-

durance. Why would they not talk? Why had even the servants been trained to keep silent? Could they not—those who seemed to care so solicitously for me—understand that the suspense was more killing than the knowledge of what had happened could possibly be? But I would endure it no longer. I would find out for myself. So it behooved me to get back my strength as fast as possible.

I was able to dress myself now and move about the room. By the next day, I had determined, I would try the stairway and descend to the lower portion of the house, where I would surely find someone of the servants I could persuade or force to talk. The mystery must, it should be cleared up.

It was just as I had so determined that Affra came in. I could tell at once by her manner that it was a stolen visit.

"Oh, you are ever so much better!" she cried out joyfully as she hurried to me.

I gave her no time for further speech at the moment. Catching her by the shoulder, I turned her chin up till my eyes were looking full into hers. I spoke with some sternness:

"Affra, I want you to tell me here and now, without a moment's demur, why it is that no one will answer my questions about Alec? Where is Alec, and what has happened to her?"

Her face paled and her eyes shifted from mine. Then as the color reddened her cheeks, she stammered:

"Alec is—is —— Alec has gone away."

"Gone away?" I echoed dazedly. "Gone where?"

"To—to visit."

"To visit whom?"

"Mis—Mistress Anne Coming, I—I suppose. Oh! Oh! you should not ask me questions!"

I turned her about till again she was forced to look at me.

"You suppose?" I repeated. "Look here! Affra, this is not the truth you are telling me. Oh! did I ever think that my little sweetheart, so fine and sweet in every way, would deal thus with me?"

The reproach in my voice was too much for her. With an hysterical burst of weeping she threw her arms around me.

"Oh! I can't, I can't bear it! I've got to tell you! spite of all they've said to me. Oh! I can't keep it another minute. I can't! I can't! The—the Ind—Indians carried off Alec!"

"What?" I cried out as I staggered to a chair. "My God! child, what is this you are telling me?"

"The truth, Master Ashton; the awful, awful truth. Oh, please, please do not let it kill you, as they said it would while you were so weak. Oh, I can never, never forgive myself if it does! The doctor said we must not excite you by telling you, because of the trouble with your head. This is why we have all been silent."

For a space I was capable of neither sound nor movement. I was like one turned to stone by the horror of what I had learned. Alec, my Alec captured by the Indians! Alec, my heart's love, in the hands of those brutes! who no doubt by now ——

The room was swimming about me. I felt dizzy, sick, faint. My heart was beating as though it would burst its bounds. But I managed to draw the sobbing child to me to comfort her.

"Poor little one! Poor little one!" I said as I stroked the bright head so like to that of my lost love.

Then a full sense of my loss again rushing over me, I got up and began to pace back and forth like some wild thing that has been suddenly caged.

Affra followed me, to catch my hand and to plead with me.

"Oh, Master Ashton! please, please don't! Please don't kill yourself. I'll never, never get over it if you do! Oh! Oh! you are staggering as though you would fall. Please, please sit down again."

Thus coaxing, she got me back to the chair. After a time, when I had grown calmer, and had begun to question her, she gave me a clear account of what had happened at the close of the battle.

'Twas the brave child herself who had unbarred the front door to the rescuers from the Great House. This was just as I had been struck on the head by a club in the hand of one of the savages. Fortunately, it was a glancing blow; otherwise would I never have lived to hear the account of it.

It was as the blow was descending upon me that Alec had screamed and was dragged away through the window. At the same time that Sir Nathaniel and the black men with him had gained entrance through the front door, Mullins and his party, together with Langdon and a band of friendly Indians, who had been visiting him, fell upon the foe from the rear.

Amazed was I beyond words to hear of the part Langdon had played both in the battle in the fields and the rescue in the cabin. I heard the account not only from Affra, but later from Sir Nathaniel. Not only had Langdon, with his Indian allies, arrived in time to turn the tide of battle; but he had pursued the fleeing savages and had brought back the slaves and the cattle they had carried off.

What wily move was this on Langdon's part, I wondered; for, knowing the man as I did; having seen what I had, I could not bring myself to believe in his sincerity. There had been some trickery in what he had

done, I was sure; some design in it all to serve his own foul ends. I was not to be deceived by him as were others. Why was the Governor so blind?

The Indians had slain the old man and woman, and Oliver had been carried into captivity as well as Alec. In the mêlée that had ensued by the coming together in the cabin of the combatants, certain of the Indians had taken the captives and escaped. No trace of this party had as yet been found, though repeated efforts had been made to get on their trail.

"And how many days, Affra," I queried shakily, "since I have been imprisoned here in this room? You must tell me, dear one," I urged, as she hesitated. " 'Twill do no good but only harm to keep it from me."

" 'Twas a week ago yesterday," said she faintly.

Eight days! What might not have happened in that time? What mayhap had happened within those eight days? And I had lain here, like a helpless log, while she, my love —— Oh, Alec! Alec!

There came at this moment a scratching and a whining at the door.

Affra started up. "It's Cupid," she said. "He has been fair crazy all this time to get to you; but Sir Nathaniel and Madam forbade it. He has stolen up here, I am sure." She glanced at me enquiringly.

"Let him in," I told her.

My heart was hungry for a sight of my faithful little friend, to see the love-light that would be aglow in his eyes; to have him show me that he understood and sorrowed with me, for he, too, loved Alec.

He made a rush for me the moment the door was opened. He threw himself upon me, yelping with delight, frantic with joy. Springing into my lap, his tongue sought my face. But quickly he realized that

something was wrong, for he crouched against me, whimpering.

I bowed my head over him, my tears falling. I could see Alec's white fingers as she caressed him; her laughing face uplifted to mine as she twitted me with Cupid's desertion. Then later, as blushing divinely, she had confessed that she had first cared for the little dog because of her love for me. And blind dolt that I was, I had not so discovered!

I got up suddenly and put Cupid down. I must do something. I could not remain inactive another moment, while she, my Alec, my love ——

I began to move about, making preparations, while Cupid dogged my every footstep, and Affra watched me some moments curiously. Directly she sprang up and came to me.

"Oh! Master Ashton, what are you doing? Why are you getting those things together?"

"I am getting them together, dear, because I shall need them. I am going to find Alec."

"But oh! oh! you cannot, you know! It will kill you to try that! You are too weak. Why, you can scarcely walk! And oh! do you not see? Can you not understand? Alec is—is ——"

"No; Alec is not dead," I told her stubbornly. "Alec is alive. Something tells me that she is, and I am going to find her."

"But Sir Nathaniel, Madam, all of them believe that—that—the—the Indians ——"

"No; dear heart, the Indians would not, could not kill anything so beautiful as she."

But despite my clinging to this stubborn belief, fear, despair gripped me hard. What could I do in my weakness? How far could I go, tottering as I was like an old man? Yet would I make desperate effort

to regain my strength, and speedily. On this was I resolved.

When the Governor learned of my determination, he was firm in his opposition.

"It is folly, rashness," he told me; "pure madness, in fact. How far could you hope to go in your ignorance of forest ways, even if you were well and strong? You are no woodsman. And what of the hostile wilderness beyond? Lad, lad, it is certain courting of death. Even if you did not fall by savage hand, the wilderness would soon claim you as its victim.

"Besides," he continued soothingly, "searching parties are already out, and have been from the first; men seasoned to the hardships of the forests and with canny knowledge of Indian ways. Langdon, too, with the aid of red men who are his staunch allies, is making determined search."

Langdon? I had no confidence in Langdon, except in his treachery. But to what good to so express myself?

"And," began the Governor again, then halted. "What hope, after all, have we, knowing the savage ways as we do, that she, Mistress Alecia, is—is——?"

"She is alive," I told him as stubbornly as I had before asserted it. "She is alive," I repeated, "and it is I who will find her and bring her back."

He looked at me with pity in his eyes, such as he would have looked, I was sure, at one suddenly bereft of his sanity.

Through the next few days, as I resolutely fought for it, my strength came back. My wound had entirely healed.

When the Governor found that there was no turning of me from my resolve, he began magnanimously to help me with my preparations; not only telling me just what to take, but also aiding me with advice as to other matters.

"I will send Attakullah with you," said he. "He will at least keep you from perishing in the forest; and if there is anyone who can aid you in outwitting the red foes, it is he."

Attakullah, a friendly Catawba, had been, as I knew, long in the service of the Governor as guide and scout. His people had lived in friendship with the whites from the first settlement of the Colony. The stalwart Indian, of a rare intelligence, with whom I had an acquaintance, was, I knew, a valuable man to the Governor, especially in times of suspected Indian troubles. Thus I thanked the Governor warmly for what he was doing for me.

There came at last the day when I felt that I could start. It had been a time of torture waiting for it. I had said good-bye to Affra and left her weeping broken-heartedly. But she managed to give me a quivering smile as she promised to take care of Cupid and not let him get into mischief. I had bidden adieu to Madam Johnson and heard her kindly words of concern and of wishes for my safety. Mistress Rose had been also gracious, and her eyes were misty as she bade me not to fail to bring Alec back with me. Madam Broughton had departed for Mulberry Hill.

"Good-bye, sir," I said to the Governor as he held my hand at parting. "It may be forever; but I know that I have your prayers wherever I may be, and whatever may befall me."

"Aye; that you have, lad. God speed you and may His care be about you."

Then, lifting his hands to Heaven, while his lips quivered, he prayed God's blessing upon me.

"I can never forget your great goodness to me," I told him falteringly, and could say no more because of the fullness of my heart.

There was sadness to me in the parting, despite the

hope that buoyed me. I was going into a black wilderness, into the midst of perils from which I might never return. But if I found not my beloved there, what cared I for life?

Attakullah awaited me. He was a splendid specimen of his race, tall, sinewy, with magnificent shoulders, and a head held proudly erect. His eyes were like the eagle's, piercing in their glances; and his bronze features were as finely chiseled as though a sculptor's hand had wrought them. Like some splendid statue he stood immovable, soundless, awaiting my words.

"His Excellency has told you why we go, Attakullah?" I queried.

"Attakullah knows," he replied, and said no more.

In silence we moved forward toward the grim walls of the forest. Its gloom, its vastness, its mysteries shortly enveloped us. I saw no trail of any kind, but the Indian pressed on steadily; around the great trunks of uprooted trees, through matted stretches of undergrowth; or again we were stooping to work our way sinuously through tangles of wild grape and bamboo vines. Again it was across abandoned fields grown up thickly with sassafras bushes and stunted cedars and persimmons. Small cabins fallen to decay and charred logs of a larger building near by were grim reminders of Indian raids.

For six days we traveled, as steadily as it was in my power to go. I had grown much stronger, more fit to stand the strain.

There had been swamps to cross, and treacherous marshes. There were, too, dense thickets of cane and matted stretches of myrtle growths to penetrate.

The heat in the swamps and thickets was well-nigh unbearable; the air close and stifling. The rains

drenched us, hundreds of midges stung our faces, thorns tore our flesh and our clothing, but we went on.

It was a sweet relief to come again to the forests; to have cooling streams to wade. Some of them were barely knee-deep; but others were up to our hips. Yet even in these shady, cooler stretches, we had to rest through the mid portion of the day, owing to the fierce rays of the sun.

Several times had we come near to falling into the hands of prowling bands of savages. Each time it was Attakullah's cunning that saved us.

Now and again we came in sight of an Indian village. Most of these Attakullah avoided; but a few he had approached, seeking not only food but information. Each time he had cautioned me to keep out of sight.

We had reached a broken, hilly country, with stretches of gleaming red lands instead of white sandy spaces. There were magnificent forest growths, and wider, deeper streams.

We were making our way cautiously along the bank of one of these streams, when Attakullah suddenly halted.

"Hist!" said he. "A sound! man sound!"

Though I strained to hear, I caught nothing save the purling of the stream and the twitterings of birds.

"Sound over there!" he said, pointing. "Come!"

He moved toward a dense thicket, with a towering bank of earth back of it, a cliff in size.

He had gone but a short distance, when he stopped, peering into the shrubbery. Then he lifted his finger as a sign to me to listen, and now I caught the sound he had all along heard. It was a distinct human sound, a groan.

"Man in there," said Attakullah. "Sick or in trouble. Me find out."

I whispered back. "It may be a trap."

He grunted his disdain of the thought that he could be caught in a trap. In a brief space he was back, and there was that in his expression and his gesture that sent a thrill of speculation through me. What had he found?

As I straightened up, after worming my way through the tangles of the thicket, I saw that there was a hollowed out space extending some feet into the embankment. A man lay near the mouth of the opening. As we approached he raised up feebly, to glance at us. As I caught sight of his face, my heart gave a bound. It was Oliver, the young black who had been carried into captivity with Alec! Now would I surely hear something definite of my beloved.

But the boy was too weak, too much exhausted by all he had been through, as well as from the pain he was now suffering, to speak more than a few feeble words at first. But when we had ministered to him, dressed his wound, fed him, and given him to drink, he was sufficiently recovered to tell us a very clear story.

Alec, my darling, was alive, though still a captive. The Indians had had no intention at any time to kill her, even to harm her. She was too great a prize; for she had been taken with the intention of winning the favor of the chief, Huspah, by presenting her to him as his squaw.

I went hot and cold as I heard this dastardly plan disclosed; and ground my teeth in impotent rage.

The Indians had not gone on to their village, as at first planned, owing to a territory through which they must pass being now held by a hostile tribe. The Huspahs were only about twenty in number, too small for a war party. So they had decided to go into camp and

to send off runners to one of the towns of their allies, the Yemassees, begging for reinforcements.

All this Oliver had gained by hearing the talk of the chief men, for he understood their language, Huspahs having worked in the fields at Silk Hope.

He had been harshly treated and made to work like a slave. Two nights before, he had escaped; had been pursued, wounded, but had managed at last to elude his pursuers. Weakened by loss of blood, suffering from the wound, he had found refuge here in the cliff and, as he believed, had crawled in to die.

What were we to do? We could not leave the poor boy here to perish; neither could we take him with us. But Alec must be rescued, and quickly, before the Yemassees came up to join the Huspahs. So, leaving food and drink with Oliver, we set off.

From what Oliver had told us, as well as from what Attakullah knew of that section of the country, it was judged that the Huspah encampment was no more than a day and a half's journey away.

There was exultation in my heart. Alec, my beloved, was yet alive; and we were on our way to rescue her. But we had not gone far when doubts and perplexities began to assail me. How were we ever to accomplish so great a feat with such tremendous odds against us? If we were captured it would surely mean torture and death and there would still be that awful fate for her I loved with every beat of my heart.

Oh, if we could only come up with one of those bands sent out in the search! Where were they all? So far, we had neither seen nor heard anything of them. Evidently no one of them had gotten on the right trail.

"What are we to do, Attakullah?" I cried out despairingly. "Why, it seems pure madness to think that

just we two can contend successfully against that band of savages."

"Wait. Me show you." Then he added, his head proudly lifted:

"One good Catawba worth more than twenty Huspah dogs."

We were making our way slowly now and with the utmost caution, guarding every footfall, for we were nearing the Huspah encampment.

Attakullah turned to hold up a finger warningly.

"Smoke," he whispered. "Fire."

We pressed on, creeping warily, gliding like serpents through the tangles.

The sun was dropping behind the western forest and a great band of yellow light lay across the sky, when we caught our first view of the Indian encampment.

The camp had been made in a little glade, near to a stream. A fire was burning in the center. Savages were squatting around it intently watching a boiling pot. Others were moving about at various tasks. There was no sign of tents but against the trunk of a great tree was a brush shelter. As my gaze now intently regarded this, I caught the flutter of a woman's gown. The next moment the wearer came more fully into view, and my heart leapt. It was Alec!

"Patience!" whispered Attakullah. "When night come me get her. If make noise now, we same as dead."

It was hard to be patient; to wait with my heart beating a tattoo and every nerve a-jangle.

We wormed our way back to a safer distance, to where we could sit up and not lie with cramped limbs. And here we kept vigil, waiting for the night.

The red glow had faded out of the sky, the shadows in the forest were thickening. A breeze had sprung up.

"That good!" commented Attakullah. "It hide sounds we make."

Other noises of the forest were coming to us, rustlings, the scurrying of small feet. An owl hooted, and from farther away came the howl of a wolf. Suddenly there rang out a piercing scream, like that of a woman in agony.

"My God!" I exclaimed, starting up. "Those devils are killing her. Oh, Alec, my love! my love!"

The next moment I would have rushed away, but for Attakullah's grip upon my shoulder.

"Quiet!" said he. "That not woman; that catamount. Patience! When night come and Huspah dogs sleep, me get her."

When the darkness had thickened, and the night had gathered over us like a pall, I was in a fever to start.

"Darkness bad for what want to do," said Attakullah. "Wait for moon."

Wait for the moonlight? Why, that seemed madness; the inviting of attention. But when we had reached again the spot from which we had had our first view of the camp, I realized the Catawba's wisdom. The ground was covered with the recumbent forms of the Indians. As we crept nearer, I saw that they encircled the grass shelter, where Alec was confined. Had Attakullah attempted to reach the shelter in the darkness, he surely would have stepped on them instead of between them.

Two of the Indians had been left on guard but one had been unable to resist the inclination to slumber and had fallen asleep at his post. The other stood stolidly against a tree.

The moon was coming up, its silvery light fast spreading. The sleeping Indians lay like statues.

"Ugh! Good!" commented Attakullah. "Huspah sleep like dead dog."

He lingered some moments, studying the situation; grunted again his satisfaction, then stole away.

I lost sight of him for some seconds. Then I saw him silhouetted against the shrubbery in a beam of moonlight. Now he glided on, and as I watched, my heart pounding in my throat, I saw him creep up behind the sentinel against the tree. The next moment, apparently without a sound, the Huspah went down in a huddled heap. Attakullah turned and glided on. Now he had paused for an instant beside the outer row of recumbent forms; his pose tense, alert. Then, apparently satisfied, he stepped in among the sleeping Indians.

The moonlight played upon the scene. It rippled over the murderous-looking axes and knives with which the Indians were armed even in their sleep. Two of them had guns, each lying with the weapon across the crook of his arm. What hope was there for the brave Catawba should one of those sleeping brutes chance to awaken?

My heart began to pump the blood to my head at a furious rate. Were all those Indians really sound asleep? Might not one suddenly start up? In my imagination, I heard the blood-chilling whoop with which he would arouse his companions.

Even as I struggled with this fear, one of the Indians moved restlessly, turned over, and rolled against Attakullah. The next instant the Huspah jerked himself up to a sitting posture, awake! Attakullah stooped swiftly. A knife flashed in the moonlight, and the Huspah fell back. Had he made any sound? I waited, sick with dread. I closed my eyes, dreading to look. But, when I opened them again, it was to see Attakullah moving with the stealthiness of a cat toward the shelter.

He was there at last, and now another terrible fear

clutched at me as I saw him stoop and enter the opening. Would not Alec, taken by surprise, cry out in alarm?

I waited in an agony of suspense and dread till the tall form of the Catawba reappeared. He bore a burden now, but he picked his perilous footway through the recumbent forms as easily as before.

They had reached me at last. Attakullah put her down beside me. Her face was shining with the joy of our reunion, but there was a wonderful calm in her manner. How fine and brave she was, my love, my Alec, whom I had at times feared I should never see again.

"Mark! Oh, Mark!" she whispered brokenly as my arms went around her and her head fell against my shoulder. Then with a little whimpering cry of joy, as her arm stole up around my neck, "My dear! My dear! I knew you would come for me!"

To me at that moment it seemed as though the world held only the two of us.

CHAPTER XX

TOGETHER WE FACE THE PERILS OF THE WILDERNESS, MY LOVE AND I

It was Attakullah who put an end to our love-making.

"Not linger," said he. "Danger! Get away quick!"

He moved off, and I was surprised to see him take a direction opposite to that in which lay the Settlements.

"Why are we going in this direction," I queried, "instead of toward the Settlements?"

"That way Huspah look for us. We go so," pointing. "Fool Huspah dog."

Attakullah had paused on the bank of the stream.

"We go by water," he said. "Leave no trail."

As he thus spoke, he turned to lift Alec into his arms but she resisted.

"I can walk, Attakullah," she told him.

"Water deep. Me carry you," persisted the Catawba.

As we went on I understood the Catawba's kindliness and forethought in insisting on carrying Alec. The stream had a rough and treacherous bottom and a rapid current. The water, too, for most of the way, was considerably above our knees. But even with the added weight of Alec, the Catawba strode on, tireless and sure-footed.

After a time Attakullah turned toward a cliff-like formation overhanging the bank. There was a tangle of cane with larger growths of willows. The moonlight, falling like a silvery veil over the bluff, showed us objects with some distinctness.

There was a trail through the thicket of cane, made apparently by animals coming down to the stream to drink.

Attakullah, having put Alec down, entered the trail, leaving us to follow. Grim, gray shadows enveloped us now, but we managed to keep in view the tall form of the Catawba.

At length the trail brought us to the summit of the bluff. Here we entered a thicket of such dense growth 'twas almost of midnight blackness. From only one direction did the moonlight filter in, through an opening toward the stream.

The dawn was penetrating the opening, when I suddenly awakened, conscious of sounds. Far away they seemed now, but still I heard them; yells, wild whoops; then the boom of a gun, and of another.

I sprang up, to see Attakullah beside me.

"Huspah dog find out their loss," he grunted. "Now they go yelping off on false trail."

Alec, too, had been awakened, and now stood beside us. I could feel her hand tremble as she placed it upon my arm.

"Oh, will they not come and find us here, Attakullah?"

"No, White Lady. Trust Attakullah. Huspah dog fooled. They go on wrong trail. Listen!"

He held up a finger, and even as he called our attention, we realized that the sounds had grown fainter. In a few moments they had ceased altogether.

We shortly had further evidence of Attakullah's cunning and forethought; for he had not only brought Alec from the Huspah camp but also a pouch of food.

The sun was little more than an hour risen, when a blanket of fog began to envelop us.

"Good!" said Attakullah, who had disappeared and now returned, proudly displaying two fine fish he had speared. "Fog hide smoke; and now me make fire and cook fish."

During the day, when the fog had lifted, we had more than once the thrill of seeing Indian canoes filled with occupants gliding down-stream. But the Indians were not Huspahs, Attakullah told us; though they were Indians unfriendly to the whites.

We lay concealed in the thicket throughout the day, and again the darkness closed around us.

The forest filled with weird and awesome noises; the ghostly sighing of the wind; the stealthy fall of footsteps; the mournful hooting of owls; the mysterious murmur of the waters; the scream of a panther that made the blood run cold.

Hand in hand, Alec and I sat, waiting for the silvery light of the moon. Fireflies flashed their lanterns about us.

"I would, dear love, that we were in a safe place," Alec said wistfully, as she pressed more closely against me.

My arm tightened about her, and I bent and kissed her.

"If only we were nearer the Settlements," said she again tremulously.

"We will come to them in time," I heartened her, "with brave, wise Attakullah to aid us."

"And whatever happens, dear love," she added, "we are together."

The sweetness of the voice, the dearness of the caress she gave me was like a draught of wine.

The next morning Attakullah told me his plan. It was to seek the village of some friendly Westoes, the chief of whom was a loyal friend. It was no more than two days' journey away, and there the Catawba hoped to secure aid in reaching the Settlements.

The sun was no more than risen when we set off. We took again to the water, but shortly, the current growing too deep and too swift, Attakullah sought a landing.

It was hard going through the cane thickets. The heat was intense, the air stifling, and we suffered greatly from the stings of myriads of gnats. There were, too, matted jungles of wild grape and other vines to penetrate; but finally we came out into a somewhat open space, and from there I saw that the stream we had been following flowed into a bolder and a much wider one. We were to follow this stream to the Westoe village, Attakullah told us. Alec regarded wistfully a canoe moored to the bank.

"Truly would it be much easier going if we could borrow that."

I could see how wearied she was already, and my heart felt a pang. What must she not endure and suffer before the hardships and perils of the wilderness were over?

But when I turned to query of Attakullah about taking the canoe, he replied:

"Worse thing can do. No cover on river. If eye watching, it see us easy." Then he added significantly, "Yemassee come by river to aid Huspah."

We were shortly to have the startling evidence of this. We had not proceeded far up the river, and had just time to conceal ourselves when twelve canoes of painted and befeathered savages, six to eight men to a canoe, came gliding down-stream. It was a sight to fill with fear the stoutest heart.

When night again overtook us, we were still a full day's journey from the friendly Westoe village. Footsore and weary we lay down to rest. I could hear Alec moaning in her sleep and tossing restlessly. My heart had ached and ached through the preceding day, as I had noted the effort she made to keep pace with us. Her lips had quivered with pain even while her eyes had smiled bravely at me. We had several times in-

sisted on carrying her; but it was rarely that she would permit us to thus burden ourselves.

But as we toiled on next day, I could see her splendid courage steadily ebbing. Her clothing was a piteous sight; rent and bedraggled; hose and slippers in rags, with the tender flesh showing through the rents, bruised and bleeding.

The great ball of the sun was still hanging red above the tree tops when at last we came in sight of the Westoe village. And very shortly thereafter we were safely lodged within the dwelling of the kindly chief.

It was a great wigwam of skins and bark, and moderately clean within. We were glad enough to rest our weary bodies upon couches of soft skins. Food was brought to us, and there was no mistaking the friendliness with which we had been received.

Chief Wappoo, in company with a number of his head men, had several times journeyed down to Charles Town, and each year had been renewed the compact of friendship with the white settlers of the Province.

Alec was soon sound asleep. One of the squaws, with kindly hands, had ministered to her. The bruised and aching feet had been bathed, and a soothing balm applied. But I could not sleep, though I was weary to exhaustion; and stiff and sore. I was too greatly interested in watching Attakullah and Wappoo as they sat conversing, and smoking at intervals the same long-stemmed pipe.

I could see that the chief was worried; that now and again an expression as of fear came into his face. It was the next morning that I had enlightenment from Attakullah.

"Chief, he much uneasy," the Catawba told me. "Fear Huspah and Yemassee. If they come and find us here, they make war on town. Kill and burn.

Yemassee already heap angry with Westoe people because Westoe no longer enemy to white man."

"What are we to do, Attakullah?" I enquired anxiously.

"Attakullah know not what best," he said, "but tomorrow we go and try to make path to Settlements. Chief send men with us to guide round Huspah and Yemassee."

But early on the morrow, even while we were making preparations for the start, there came for us most alarming news.

The Yemassees and their allies were scattered thickly in the territory through which we must pass. They were massing for the long-threatened attack upon the Settlements. It seemed sheer madness to hope to get through their lines.

What were we to do? Even Attakullah had lost heart. Then the chief proposed a plan.

Four days' journey away was the main town of the great Cherokee tribe over which the White King ruled. These Indians were very powerful. Their territory extended well back into the mountains. There were numerous villages and a main town, where the White King lived.

The White King's word was law throughout the tribe. The chiefs of other tribes also obeyed him, because of their fear of him. If we could manage to reach this main town of the Cherokees, Chief Wappoo believed that its ruler, being a white man, would not only befriend us, but could probably be induced to send us to the Settlements under escort. No Yemassee or Huspah would dare molest a company of the White King's Cherokees.

There seemed nothing else to do; no other way for us out of the peril that beset us. But I did not take

favorably to the plan. Truth to tell, the thought of it disturbed me much. A white man in companionship with savages was no better in my opinion than the savages themselves. I conjured up all sorts of characters for this man who consorted with savages; a man given over no doubt to every form of immorality, of debauchery; and as I thought of Alec, in her sweetness and innocence, subjected to the contamination of such surroundings, my heart quailed. But my sweet one herself gave eager approval to the chief's plan.

"A white man?" she exclaimed, her eyes glowing hopefully. "Oh, then, he surely will befriend us who are of his own race!"

"But what if he is a scoundrel, a villain, a man of a low breed?" I felt the urge to warn her.

"Oh, I just can't think that of him!" she replied warmly.

"Besides the Governor——" began Alec again.

"Count not, dear one," I interrupted, "on the name of His Excellency having aught of influence with this man. From all I have heard of him, he yields to no man's authority."

But I hadn't the heart to depress her further with my gloomy forebodings.

It was finally arranged that we start early on the morrow. We were to go for much of the way by water.

The chief sent two of his trusty men with us, and put at our disposal one of his staunchest canoes. We parted from the kindly chief and his people with warm expressions of our gratitude. They had shown us the noblest traits of the red men.

We came to the end of our first day's journey, with naught having occurred to give us alarm, and made our camp some little distance beyond the bank of the stream, in a grove of oaks and hickories, where was a cold, clear

spring. There were soft beds of leaves on which to lie; yet I could not rest. The grim uncertainty as to how this venture was to turn out; my dread of what awaited Alec's innocent eyes in the White King's town kept me wakeful; but I resolved to do or say naught to cast a shadow on the heart of my sweet one.

Despite all that she had endured, and the uncertainty of what lay before us, she was as bonnie and gay as a starling this morning. She had repaired, while at the Westoe town, her torn clothing, and a pair of moccasins had been found to fit her. She had, too, contrived for herself hose out of cloth obtained from the squaws. So that on this morning, despite only the crudest of helps for a toilet, she had made herself as fresh and dainty and sweet a picture as ever a man's eyes had beholden.

"Well, Sir Knight of the Trail," said she, approaching me, and throwing me an arch glance from her bonnie brown eyes, "hast made up mind to part company with all gloomy thoughts?"

"Of a surety have I, most adorable Lady of My Heart."

With this she made a little rush toward me; and, as her arm went around my neck, she murmured with a sweetness that thrilled through every fiber of me:

"Despair not, dear love, God will surely guide us and care for us. We shall not perish here in the wilderness; but in His own good time will He bring us safely out of all the peril."

With such sweet faith as this to sustain me, I would have been but half a man not to have rallied to it, and so great was my love for her at that moment, it caused my voice to tremble as I replied to her.

On the third morning as we were passing across a somewhat open space, like a savannah, with tall lush

grasses, the two Westoes and Attakullah simultaneously halted and glanced behind apprehensively.

"What is it, Attakullah?" I queried anxiously.

"Sounds," said he; "much sounds. Footsteps and many of them. Quick! into the grass!"

But we were too late!

Almost at the moment that Attakullah had spoken, a band of savages emerged into the opening. With fierce whoops of joy they bore down upon us. At sight of Alec, whom I in vain tried to shield from their gaze, they capered about like madmen, pointing to her, and gesturing to each other. Then they closed in about us, but not a single weapon was raised to harm us. It was strange that it was so, since the Indians were fully armed. Some had muskets; others carried bows with arrows that had heads of white crystal in the shape of hearts; others again bore spears tipped with some shining metal.

Speedily were we separated from Attakullah and the two Westoes. The latter were told to begone; and at once took their departure, nowise reluctant.

"Oh, look!" cried Alec, pulling my sleeve. "It is Oliver! Poor boy! they have captured him, too!"

It was Oliver, borne up between two of the savages.

"Oh! what do you think this means for us?" faltered Alec, raising beseeching eyes to me.

What could it mean save capture; and by a band of as fierce-looking redskins as ever my eyes had looked on. Yet I had to admit they were different from any of their race I had yet encountered. They were stalwart of frame, of finer carriage; more intelligent of countenance, and lighter of hue.

A litter was now produced in which they proceeded to carry Alec. It was of some gaily-striped cloth,

closely woven, and hung between two poles. I marveled at the brilliance and texture of the cloth.

Alec smiled at me hearteningly as she was borne aloft on the shoulders of two, and sometimes four sturdy fellows.

"Why, I feel like a queen," said she, "carried in some triumphal procession!"

She was striving with all her fine courage to be my brave bonnie sweetheart, to strengthen me, but I could see the doubt, the fear that now and again flitted across her face.

It was mid-afternoon of the following day, when we came to a fine, bold stream, along the bank of which many canoes were moored. We crossed the stream to enter a forest of noble trees. A broad, smoothly-beaten path led through it. Emerging from the forest, it was to gaze upon a scene so wonderfully entrancing it fairly took my breath away.

It was a great wide open space of rolling country that lay before us; of valleys of lush grasses, where droves of sleek cattle fed; of fertile fields of maize, turned a russet hue in the summer sunlight; of other fields of golden pumpkins and green melons. Far away against the horizon stretched a line of blue mountains. On rising ground in the midst of all this beauty and fertility was a great town of many homes, of gardens and fruitful orchards. And now enlightenment dawned upon me. This was the goal to which we had ourselves started forth. Here before us lay that mysterious town of which we had heard and wondered much; the home of the White King of the Cherokees.

I turned to see Alec smiling at me.

"At last, Mark, my brave heart," said she, waving her hand in the direction of the great town upon the hill, "succor is at hand for us!"

But was it to be thus?

We arrived at length at the great main gateway with its imposing pillars of stone. At the summit of each pillar floated the standard of the White King; a banner of red, and emblazoned thereon a golden eagle, poised for flight.

There was a blast of a horn; the roll of a drum, answered by similar sounds from within the stockade, and the massive gates of wood and iron swung open to admit us.

We entered upon a broad, beautifully kept avenue, lined with magnolias and other noble trees. Men, women, and children came running to peer at us curiously, and to exclaim and gesture excitedly. Others rushed to greet the returning warriors.

The men who had us in charge met with great difficulty in making their way through the throngs. Especially was Alec the object of their curiosity and of their most excited gestures.

I fell into further speculation concerning these Indians; for, as before stated, they were different from any yet seen. One marked point of difference was that they did not paint their faces.

Like our captors, the other men of the village were tall, straight, of fine bearing, and of a light coppery hue. The women, too, were slender, of graceful form, lighter of coloring than the men, and many of them were quite comely.

These savages were clothed instead of half nude, or almost nude, as had been the case in other villages. The women wore skirts and bodices of brightly-colored cloth, adorned with lace and beadwork. A number of them had mantles of feather work, wrought with such skill they shone with the luster of silk.

The men were arrayed in a costume that reminded me

of the kilts of the Highlanders. Waistcoats, short skirts, leggings, moccasins were all of finely dressed deerskin, and each garment lavishly adorned with colored fringes and glittering beadwork.

A curious ornament that I had first noticed being worn by the men who had captured us, I now saw upon the breast of each man of the village. A crescent-shaped trinket it was of a shining metal that I was sure was pure gold; worn pendant from the neck by a chain of silver.

Other tree-lined, beautifully kept streets intersected the one upon which we were conducted; and I had glimpses of picturesque abodes, of lovely gardens, of vines and trees rich with fruits; of clusters of bee-hives; of thrift, prosperity, system everywhere visible; and steadily my wonder grew.

We came in time to quite an imposing-looking structure in the midst of an open space set with flowers of brilliant hue. Broad walks led up to it. It was an oblong structure, the arched roof resting upon great pillars of wood elaborately carved.

This was the Council House, as it needed no further reflection on my part to determine. Skins of bear, deer, wolf, and other animals were spread all about.

We were soon seated upon one of the rugs, and left for a time to our own reflections. The throngs about the building had steadily increased, for we were still the objects of a mighty curiosity.

At last I had opportunity for speech with Attakullah. Certain of the men, he told me, had gone to learn the pleasure of the White King concerning us.

"Oh, Attakullah," queried Alec tremulously, "how do you think the White King will treat us?"

"Cannot tell, White Lady; maybe good, maybe not. King mighty strange man, Attakullah hear. Bad man,

some say, very bad man; and he got great power to do as it please him."

"But remember you not, he is white as we are? And surely he will not be unkind."

Attakullah gave a grunt that sounded like disdain.

"Ugh!" said he; "many white men bad; bad as can be."

There came now the blare of trumpets, the pounding of drums, the clashing of cymbals, and the chanting of voices.

"King coming!" announced Attakullah and stood up. We too got to our feet. As quickly as though a magic hand had parted them, the people massed about the Council House moved to right and left, and stood in orderly ranks. No sooner done than at the head of this lane appeared the first of the marching, chanting men. Borne aloft in their midst was the red and gold banner of the White King.

But where was the White King? the man in whose honor was all this glory of display? For now that the young chieftain in command had brought his men to a halt in front of us, there was no personage in sight of a kingly presence.

"King he not come," said Attakullah, after listening for some seconds to a conversation between the young chief, and the men who had been left to guard us. "We go to King," he continued.

Alec was assisted to a litter of the most sumptuous appearance, and again lifted to the shoulders of stalwart bearers. The procession now wheeled about and set off again. The horns, the pounding of the drums, and the chanting of the men making a greater noise than ever.

"They sing praises of the White King," said Attakullah. "Say he came from sky to reign over them; that the Great Spirit himself sent him."

We turned into a broad, tree-lined avenue, as fine in appearance as the one by which we had entered the town. At intervals between the trees on each side, there were curiously shaped earth-mounds, each bearing at its summit the form of some animal in clay or wood. About the neck of each in metal like copper was the crescent-shaped talisman.

Shortly there appeared before us the goal to which I was sure we were bound. On an eminence overlooking the entire town, was the abode of the White King; one large building of somewhat pretentious appearance, with a number of smaller ones clustered about it. There were gardens and orchards, and all surrounded by a wall of stone.

As we approached the gates, above which floated the royal standard, the din of horns and drums and chanting suddenly ceased. Then a single drum was beaten, with three lingering taps; and a single horn was blown.

The gates slowly unclosed, and toward us came marching a company of spearmen, each spear gold-tipped and flashing in the sunlight. We were now taken in charge by these men; our former escort saluting and turning back.

We passed up a broad flight of steps into a vine-enclosed verandah that extended across the entire front of the building. The vines were in full flower, and gave forth the sweetest of scents.

Crossing the verandah we entered a wide doorway, from which folds of a rich drapery were drawn back to admit us, and found ourselves in an apartment of considerable size, richly furnished with silken draperies and rugs of such splendor they filled me with amazement.

At one side, midway of the extent of the room, was a dais, and mounted upon it a great chair hung about

with draperies of a silken stuff threaded with gold. On pedestals were ornaments and statues of beaten gold and of copper.

We were kept standing. I put my arm about Alec to support her, and now began a succession of mummeries that gave me an uncanny feeling. Men, whom I judged from their robes to be priests, were gathered about two large earthen vessels, from which a thin smoke was beginning to rise.

As the pungent odors from the smoking vessels began to fill the room, the priests broke into a chant that gradually rose higher and higher, to reach its climax in an outburst of wild shrill sounds of such weirdness it sent a chill through me.

All this while the men about us had stood like statues, but as the chanting broke forth, they dropped to their knees.

As suddenly as it had begun the chanting ceased. There was not a sound, a movement throughout the room. The silence was deep, profound, continuous. It filled me with a vague uneasiness. What did it portend? There was something about it all; the sudden cessation of every sound; the tense brooding silence that was truly uncanny, wholly disturbing.

As I stood there pondering, my uneasiness grew with every passing moment. Try with all my force of will I could not shake off a foreboding sense of evil as we waited there in that grim silence.

I could feel Alec trembling as she leaned more heavily against me. That uncanny silence was having its effect upon her also. I caught and crushed her to me with a fierceness that must have astonished her; for I heard her give a sharp little cry of amazement. I bent my head. I was about to speak, to pour out to her some of that which was surging in my heart, when

there came the blare of a trumpet. A voice made proclamation of some sort. Instantly every man in the room was on his feet, and stood waiting, expectant.

The drapery at the back of the dais was parted by two warriors in glittering uniform, who now stood at attention on each side. Six others filed through, and ranged themselves about the great chair. And now there appeared a figure tall, commanding, walking with proud bearing, as became Majesty.

His raiment of vivid red slashed with gold, gleamed and glowed. Innumerable pendant ornaments of beads, shells, and metals glittered and tinkled as he walked. About his forehead and temples was a band of gold, which by some cunning contrivance sent upward rays of light, the glow of which encircled his head like a halo.

At his appearance every man in the room prostrated himself as before. A cry arose and swelled through the room.

I heard Alec give a little gasping cry, and felt her lean more heavily against me. As to myself I was so astonished, so dazed by what I beheld as to be incapable of sound. For the man now taking his seat in the great chair, he who posed as the White King of the Cherokees, was Henry Langdon!

He clapped his hands, and the prostrate men got to their feet, and stood humbly waiting, a look of adoration upon each face.

Turning toward two of his attendants, he gave a command. Cushions were brought, and he waved a hand to us to be seated. After some moments, he addressed Alec.

"So," he said, with an intonation of pride, "my men sent out to search for you found you at last, Mistress Hastings?".

"They found us as we were on our way here," she

replied, and in the sweet voice there was no note of trembling.

"You were coming here? And what, may I ask, was bringing you to me, Mistress?"

"We were in the wilderness; in peril; surrounded by savage enemies; and unable to make our way to the Settlements."

"And what thought you I could do for you, Mistress?"

There was a little cynical curve of his lips.

"Very naturally was it that, knowing you were of our own race, and hearing of the power you possess to journey unmolested through the wilderness, we came to you for aid."

She was gazing at him fearlessly, the lovely head proudly uplifted.

"And who has poured such wondrous stories into your ears, Mistress Hastings?"

Here I felt constrained to speak out. Knowing the man as I did, his treachery, his villainy; that he was in fact, despite all his posing, a low scoundrel, a black-hearted piratical rover of the seas, his manner toward her angered me.

"What other hope had we," I queried of him, "but to appeal to you, trusting that one of our own race would at the dictates of a common humanity give us the succor we need."

He laughed sardonically, and glanced at me as though he had just seen me.

"And what brought you into the wilderness, my bantam? For, with all your lusty crowing, you are but a bantam."

His mocking words stung me; yet did I still realize the urge for control.

"I came to search for her, whom, thanks to a kind

Providence, I had the good fortune to find and to rescue."

"One must needs have a strong heart to set forth on such venture as that," and I caught a covert sneer in the words.

"I have not yet found my heart turn coward at thought of any venture, no matter how perilous," I told him proudly.

"But heavens, man!" he exclaimed, and now was there a far different tone in his voice. "It was sheer madness, and you a ——"

"I know what you would name me," hotly. "Best not."

"Young fool! You go wild in your conclusions. Knew you not," he flung at me, "that I had my Indians out in the search, and that in time they would surely find and rescue Mistress Hastings?"

Still reckless, I was about to reply to this when I felt Alec's hand press mine warningly.

Langdon again issued a command. Two of the men hurried away, and shortly returned, bearing food, which they set before us on platters of inlaid gold, hand-wrought. The goblets, too, in which a ruby wine sparkled, were of gold.

I glanced at the food, rebellious at the thought of partaking of food provided by Langdon.

"Eat, dear," Alec urged me, seeing my reluctance. "You are in need of the food."

As I ate I still held to gloomy pondering. What was to be our fate at Langdon's hands? So far he had given us no intimation of favorably considering our plea for aid in reaching the Settlements. He was treacherous, as I had cause to know; with all the evil qualities that blacken a man's character. What kindliness then could we expect from him?

Yet had I been surprised on this occasion to see naught of malice or of a sinister nature in his face. Beyond a play of cynicism, a touch of sardonic mirth at my expense, a covert sneer or two, there had been naught in either countenance or manner to bring to mind the cruel, vindictive face he had shown us in the encounter at Oaklands.

Here was a man of two natures, I was sure, in whom the good and evil were combined, though little of the good, I had to admit. At times had he shown the grace and the courtesy of the gentleman, at others the black-heartedness of a fiend. And now here was he bearing himself regally, obeyed not only as a sovereign but worshipped as a god by these savage people.

He would surely be revenged upon me for what I knew of him; for the words with which I had accused him, piratical robber that he was; because, too, of what had occurred at Oaklands.

What ground for hope then was there for us in his present changed manner? The wolf might change his coat, but never his disposition. What act of humanity could we expect from him?

He would probably put me to death, seeing the cause he had to do so. But there was Alec. Yes, oh, God! there was Alec! What fate might there not be in store for her? As this thought assailed me with all its torment, I reached out quickly and drew her to me in so fierce an embrace it brought from her an exclamation of dismay.

"Why, Mark!" said she in wonder, "what is it, dear? why, you are trembling!" with alarm, "are you ill?"

Now, while she gazed at me thus, and while I still remained mute, from the very inability to speak, there came a din of sounds from without, shouts, running feet, alarmed outcries.

Two men came hurriedly in, prostrating themselves and lifting their hands with a gesture that besought a hearing. As Langdon nodded, sounds of a guttural nature poured from the lips of one of them.

As he ceased, there was a stir throughout the room. Men moved uneasily. At a word from Langdon, the room was quickly cleared. Langdon, too, had disappeared. What did it mean?

I turned to seek Attakullah, and saw him making his way toward us.

"Yemassee and Huspah at the gate," he said. "Mad about something. Making demand of White King."

"But what do they want, think you?"

"Attakullah go find out. Look like it mean war. Men tell King row of arrows stuck up in ground outside gate. That Yemassee sign of war."

The moments dragged on. I could hear distant sounds, somewhat startling ones. Attakullah had not returned. I could stand the suspense no longer. Alec, too, was uneasy, and had made many anxious queries of me.

"I will go and find out what is the matter," I told her. "But you must stay here, dear one. It will be safer."

"No! No!" she exclaimed. "I go with you." Then the brave, brown eyes lifted to mine with the love glow in them, she added, "In life or death, we are together, Mark."

The noises had grown louder, and more menacing.

Half-way to the gates, we met Attakullah returning.

"What is it?" I queried, fearful to hear his reply.

"Yemassee and Huspah they want White Mistress. Threaten what they do if White King not give her up."

Good God! so this was what all those blood-curdling cries, those fiendish shouts meant? Those devils had

tracked us here, and were threatening war on the town if Alec were not given up! Of course, that foul-hearted villain, Langdon, would yield.

But a crime so foul should not be committed. Rather would I see her die by my own hand, and I would die with her.

My hand sought and found the good, trusty knife. She saw and understood, for now was she looking at me with all her woman's soul in her eyes. I caught and held her close.

We were now nearer the gates. The shouts, the cries had grown more threatening. In the midst of it all, Langdon stood, calm, unmoved, issuing his commands. His splendid figure towered above all others. Though I held only hatred of the man, I could but admire his regal bearing.

Suddenly there came an outburst of defiant yells from outside the gates, followed by a shower of arrows. I saw them finding marks, heard screams of pain; then one came speeding straight toward the towering form of the White King.

The arrow caught him full in the breast.

He wavered for a moment, made desperate effort to remain upright, then tottered backward. There were anguished outcries, sobs, moans, choked exclamations, as his loyal people gathered about him. And now, with demon yells and a mad rush toward the gates, another group made ready for the charge. As the gates flew open, the avengers sped through, screeching like devils.

The mourning people had now placed the stricken form of their King upon a litter. The arrow had been removed, and the flow of blood staunched in the native way; but not altogether, for I saw it dripping from the litter as the mournful procession passed us. I saw too, the pallid face of the wounded man. It was like that

of one already dead, and, despite the feelings I held toward him, a pang of fear smote me. He was the one other being of the white race here among all this horde of red savages. While in health and strength and the fullness of his power, he had been our one hope, an uncertain one at best, but still a hope. But now with the White King dying, dead—for he surely had all the appearance of a dying man—what would be our fate here among this savage people; rendered frantic and desperate by his loss?

Not knowing what else to do, we turned back toward the apartment we had recently acquitted. Attakullah kept close to us. His face, usually so stolid and emotionless, was alive with anxiety.

"If arrow poison King, he dead," he said.

"Attakullah, why do you suppose the Yemassees and Huspahs were so rash as to seek to kill him?" I queried.

"Don't know if meant to kill or not. But King he anger them, because he refuse to give up White Mistress."

"He refused to give her up?" I repeated, amazed.

"Yes; he tell them he not give her up, no matter what they do; King he not so bad, after all."

I looked at Alec, who was looking at me. The same question was in the eyes of each. What could it mean?

We sat there perhaps through the space of an hour; the prey of many doubts and fears. Then a man parted the curtains back of the dais, and spoke to Attakullah.

"White King want you," the Catawba said to me.

I got up, hesitating, glancing anxiously at Alec.

"Send for White Mistress too," said Attakullah.

With my hand in hers, we passed through the folds of the curtain, and followed the messenger.

We ascended a stairway, crossed a hall, and paused before a closed door, on which our guide gave two light

raps. It was opened, and we entered an apartment, large, well-lighted, and furnished with luxury, as I quickly noted.

On a couch with silken coverings Langdon was lying, his face as white as the linen of the pillows on which his head rested. In his pallid face his eyes glowed burningly.

Seeing that I hesitated, he made a feeble gesture to me to advance.

As I approached his eyes softened, and the faintest of smiles played about his lips as he addressed me.

"Come nearer, Mark Ashton. Do not draw back as though I were a thing too vile to touch. Lad, give me your hand, and give it freely, for I am your brother, Edward Ashton."

CHAPTER XXI

WE JOURNEY BACK TO SILK HOPE, TO MEET WITH ADVENTURE ON THE QUEEN'S HIGHWAY

At those words, "I am your brother, Edward Ashton," I was struck motionless. A blackness settled about me; my hand, half-way to his, halted. Of a truth was I beyond speech, incapable of movement. A grim terror held me. I went cold from head to foot. Could I believe what I had just heard? This man, scoundrel, villain, the devil's own, as I knew him to be, a man blackened by many crimes, was claiming to be my father's son, the inheritor of a proud old title; the one whom I had been sent into the wilderness to find by a parent whose whole heart and soul were bound up in him. Great God, what a revelation! What an ending to my quest!

I heard Alec cry out sharply, utter unintelligible words. Then she was beside me, leaning against me, her hand catching my arm. As dazed was she as I. No need to look into her face to see that.

"Mark! oh, my poor Mark!" she gasped out, and I felt her trembling.

He glanced at us, smiling cynically now.

" 'Tis so bad as that?" he queried. "Truly must I have played a mean part before you to so shake you by what I have revealed. But no matter! Let it pass. Time hastens, and so must I in what I have to say and do."

His speech halted, came gaspingly toward the end. His eyes closed and a spasm of pain passed over his face. Instantly the attendant was at his side, offering a reviving potion.

He swallowed with some difficulty. But the draught had its effect, for he opened his eyes and again addressed me, his voice steadier.

"No matter what you may think of me now, what cause you may have had in the past even to abhor me, the fact remains; we are brothers; sons of the same father. The same mother bore us. Because of this, boy, give me your hand. If it is any comfort to you to know that it is for the last time, let it be so. For, lad, this is the end for me. Those devils have gotten me. My hours are numbered."

As he held my hand for a moment, and, looking up, must have seen something of the horror that still brooded in my eyes, despite all my effort to conceal it, he smiled whimsically.

"You were ever a moody, sulking, hard-hating little beggar, as I remember, with no love for your elder brother. Understanding this, 'twas my delight to rouse and torment you. But all that is past, Mark, my brother. We have come now to where we part forever; and in this hour of death, let all be forgotten."

He motioned for another draught of the reviving potion, swallowed it, and continued:

"Believe it or not, as it pleases you, but it has been hard to conduct myself toward you in the manner it was necessary I should do if I foiled you in the likelihood of discovering in me your brother. From the first was I resolved that you should not so recognize me. More than once, however, it seemed to me were you very near to doing so. There must be, I feared, some gesture, some movement, some play of feature that would bring me to your remembrance. Thus each time I saw that dawning look in your eyes, I thwarted you. Your quest must go unrewarded, you must never find in me the brother for whom you searched, since my resolve

was fixed that never would I under any circumstance return to England."

He paused, drew his breath with difficulty, and then went on, "So 'twas my will to play such part before you as would make me absolute stranger to you; yea, more than mere stranger."

Here he gave me a look that, bringing to mind much of the black horror of the past, sent again those numbing chills through me.

"But my father!" I cried out, finding my voice at last. "Our father! what am I to tell him?"

"Tell him," he said slowly, as though weighing each word, "that your quest was in vain, because I was already dead."

He closed his eyes from weakness, and the attendant, having again ministered to him, and with hands so gentle for one of his savage breed 'twas truly amazing to see, my brother continued:

"Now must I hasten in what I have to say and do, for I can feel the shadows gathering. You must not linger here, for with me gone 'twill not be safe. Tomorrow at dawn you start. Arrangements are already in progress."

Now for the first time he addressed Alec:

"Come nearer, Mistress. Do not fear me. Though in life I gave you cause to have no good feeling toward me, yet never did I harm you. There is a message I would send by you, which only a woman's gentle tongue can so speak as to soften the blow; and which only a woman's heart can teach her to so deliver it will carry with it balm for the hurt.

"Tell her, My Rose, that I loved her to the end, that her name was the last on my lips, and to whatever shore I am bound, there I wait for her." He paused, then added, "But tell her not, Mistress, I beseech of you,

amid what surroundings you found me, nor how I died; only that I am dead."

We were shown to rooms made ready for us. Then one came, Attakullah with him, and the plans for the morrow were told us. The black boy, Oliver, was to go with us.

When I enquired the next morning as to my brother's condition, I was told that he was in a stupor, so I did not see him again.

I have no intention of setting down in detail the incidents and the adventures marking that journey through the wilderness back to Silk Hope. We had a strong guard of full two score men, the pick of the Cherokee warriors. Alec was carried by litter; thus was she saved the discomforts and hardships of the trail. We had an abundance of food; and the men, familiar with the more beaten trails, which they had traveled back and forth with him known as the White King, found for us pleasant camping spots.

There were, of course, dangers and perils that barely passed us by. Twice was the camp attacked by wild creatures of so fierce a nature they were not driven off before two of the men had received painful wounds. And, although we bore with us the standard of the much-dreaded White King, yet more than once did a sullen band of savages seem determined to disregard it and give us trouble.

I tried to keep up a brave appearance, to show a cheerful mood for Alec's sake; but despite all my effort, the black shadows of gloom settled about me. Thoughts of my father tore at my heart. How was I ever to tell him how vain had been my quest? That the son he idolized, in whom were placed his fondest hopes of the future, was dead? But better thus, I realized again

and again, than that he should know of a son living, who cast shame and dishonor upon an honored name. My God! how could I ever have borne it, to have to tell him that the son he adored, the hope of his old age, was a wrong-doer, a worker of iniquity, a man whose evil heart had led him into many crimes?

But now and again was the gloom lifted; and, as I lay under the stars at night, with the moon swimming in an azure sea, and all about me the noises of the vast, mysterious forest, I fell into sweet reveries, dreamed dreams of the roseate future. And in the day, as I walked beside her, the woman who had all my heart, and saw in her eyes the radiance of hope and the glow of a love that would never change, did the darkness lift and the shadows flee away.

Thus we came at length to the end of the journey, back to Silk Hope, to find there much disquiet and disturbance of mind.

The Governor was in deeper trouble than ever. He had at last made proclamation concerning the annulment of the Church Acts; but disorder had broken out in another direction. He was in serious conflict with the Quakers. As the movements of the French and Spanish foes of the Colony had grown more and more alarming, the Governor had found it necessary to put the entire Province under strict military rule.

Every citizen able to do so, no matter of what creed or nationality, was under compulsion to bear arms in defense of the Colony. But the Quakers, of whom there were now something like six score among the Carolina settlers, had refused to do this. When given muskets, they had thrown them down, declaring, "We fight not!" The Governor had imprisoned some of the more troublesome of the recalcitrants, since under the circumstances he could do no less. In gaol they were adding

to the trouble by preaching their doctrines from its windows to every passer-by, awakening sympathy by reciting their wrongs. As in all controversies there are two sides, there were many to espouse the cause of the Quakers, and to attack the Governor for what was termed his arbitrary act in imprisoning a peace-loving people, who had committed no higher offense than to proclaim their abhorrence of war and to refuse to take part in it.

The Quakers, most of them, had arrived in the Colony during the administration of Governor Archdale, who was himself a Quaker. They had fled to Carolina from persecution in the more northern Colonies. There the treatment accorded them had been barbarous in the extreme.

So far there had been no serious conflict between them and the government of the Province; although they had refused to declare allegiance to Her Majesty, would give no testimony under oath in any court of justice; and not a penny would they pay toward the support of any form of public worship. They protested against the injustice of having to make contribution toward the maintenance of a creed they could not conscientiously accept.

Now, however, the alarming condition of affairs, the peril from foes that menaced the safety of the Colony, had forced the Governor to the step of compelling every man able to do so to take up arms in defense of the Province.

They were discussing this deplorable state of affairs that afternoon when I entered the Red Deer Inn.

For once Major Popple was warmly advocating the Governor's methods; his attitude toward the Quakers.

"Force them to military duty? Zounds! Why not, sir? The milk-veined poltroons, the pigeon-hearted

skulkers, whose mealy tongued babblings of peace are stirring up the very devil's mess of a broil! Damme, sir, haven't they as much right, nay, more, to shoulder a musket in defense of the land that has succored and sheltered them as any man in it?''

''Gentler methods might the better serve the Governor's purpose,'' remarked Sir John. '' 'Tis truly unfortunate at this time to have such trouble break out, when the Province was just beginning to quiet down from a state of turmoil.''

''Gentler methods be hanged!'' blazed the Major. ''What will they avail with such stubborn cattle? Drive them at the point of the goad, say I; or drive them out. Let the white-livered babblers understand they can't live in a country they refuse to defend.''

''But if a man has no stomach for fighting, why force him to it?'' mildly interposed Monsieur St. Julien. ''If his conscience tells him it is wrong, why not honor his conviction?''

''Conscience be damned! 'Tis no dictate of conscience but a subterfuge on the part of these mealy-mouthed contenders to keep out of trouble.''

''You are too hard in your judgment, Major,'' spoke up Captain Cantey. ''I am satisfied these Quakers are honest in their beliefs. Have they not, many of them, suffered death, yea, worse than death, for the sake of what they believe?''

''They are fanatics, every one of them!'' growled the Major; ''and ought to be brought to their senses by even rougher measures than the Governor has employed.''

''The Quakers are honest in their abhorrence of war,'' here spoke Jason Allen. ''And who can blame them? For war is a horror. It is murder, and no less.''

''War is often necessary for the protection of man's

life, his home, for the vindication of his rights," said Captain Cantey. "Therefore is there just cause to make war."

"Necessary, too, is war in the matter of conquest, in the expansion of territory, the winning of new worlds," agreed Sir Christopher somewhat pompously.

"Man comes into the world to meet with strife," Captain Cantey took up the discussion again; "to face struggle, the necessity to fight for himself, his rights, his liberties. From his cradle to the six feet of earth in which he finally reposes, it is a constant warfare. Then why should not men be bred to war as well as to any other pursuit?"

Jason Allen quickly replied to this.

"But no matter," said he, "toward what end war is made, no question of justice can enter into it. No war is just, because no war is ever necessary."

"But by Gad! sir, what would you have?" blazed Sir Christopher. "Here is this Province in peril; on the point of being attacked by foes as merciless as the devils of hell. Would you have us sit down, meekly, fold our hands, and submit to being slaughtered?"

"You misunderstand me, Sir Christopher. To take up arms in defense of life and home is a far different thing from war waged vindictively for the purpose of gaining some sordid end. All war is barbarous. I stand by my belief. 'Tis the method of savages; of wild beasts inflamed by passion. Civilized man should avoid it, regarding it with horror; for truly is it a hideous and a repugnant thing."

He paused a moment; then as a flush overspread his face, he added with heat, "War is the Devil's method of populating hell!"

"I agree with you, Master Allen," spoke Monsieur

St. Julien, and most warmly for him. "War is hell unchained."

Thus they argued back and forth; some for the peace principles of the Quakers; others against them; but Jason Allen had no more to say. He retired to a corner to pore over his accounts; and, as I glanced at him, I wondered if he had not in the past met with some fearful experience in the hell he termed war to so establish him in his horror of it.

At the news of the death of him known to them as Henry Langdon, which I conveyed to them, there were many expressions of a keen regret. Greatly was I surprised to discover that he had held not only their esteem but had been warmly regarded by more than one of them. Alas! that he had so deceived them, he who had wrought such evil, whose life had been a mockery.

'Twas the Governor who warmly summarized what I found to be the prevailing opinion with reference to him known as Henry Langdon, gentleman planter of Goose Creek.

"He was a man of winning ways, of fine instincts, and wonderful abilities; but of incomprehensible moods at times. Yet men believed in him, both trusted and admired him and his sway over them was marked. There is no man among us more loyal to the Province than was he, no one who has given more generously of himself and his wealth. His place will be hard to fill. I mourn him both as staunch supporter and friend." He sighed deeply as he finished speaking.

Merciful was it, I thought, that he had been taken ere his villainy had been exposed, his black-heartedness made known to these trusting friends.

Try as hard as I did, I could not get the thought of him out of my mind in connection with the vile deeds of which I knew him to be guilty.

Alec had softened the blow of his death as best her woman's heart could devise, but the grief of Mistress Rose was such as was beyond all comfort. No longer was she an imperious maid, but a spiritless, heart-broken one.

The days passed and grew into weeks. The rumors of advancing foes had quieted down. The Governor had been twice summoned in haste to Charles Town; but, finding it a false alarm each time, had returned to look after his plantation affairs. For once he had heeded wise advice and given up his conflict with the Quakers. They had been released from gaol, and Peace, it seemed, at last brooded over the much distracted Province.

There was, however, great concern now on account of an epidemic that had broken out in the Town. It was a fever of a most malignant type, and it had taken many lives. For a time it gave little promise of abating.

We were all busy at Silk Hope during those days; Madam Johnson and her black helpers, with the aid of Alec and Mistress Rose, engaged in domestic affairs; the overseers attending to the harvesting and storing of the crops; the reels and looms running regularly at the silk houses, and the Governor and I poring over accounts and seeing to shipments.

Clement Hastings was still in Barbadoes, while the Governor's son, Robert Johnson, had not returned from his mission abroad.

Then suddenly the blow descended. 'Twas no mistake, no false alarm this time. The French ships, five of them, had been sighted not far beyond the entrance to Charles Town harbor, while the Spaniards, it was reported, were hastening from St. Augustine to join in the attack on the Town.

The Governor hurried by boat to Charles Town, Madam Johnson and also Madam Broughton accompanying him. On account of the epidemic in the Town, the Governor was to establish his headquarters a half mile outside and from that point direct the defense.

I was left to attend to some important matters and to follow on the morrow in attendance upon the young ladies and Madam Ball, who were to travel by the chaise the Governor had had sent over recently from England, and of which he was exceedingly proud. It was the largest traveling vehicle I had yet seen in the Province; and very handsome, adorned, as it was, with gilt and upholstered in crimson cloth. It was hung high upon four wheels and required four horses to draw it.

Young Harcourt was to accompany me in attendance upon the ladies. Affra had gone with the Governor and Madam Johnson, very much against her will. She clamored to be with Alec and me, but was overruled.

I felt a keen sympathy for Harcourt. The poor fellow was desperately in love with Mistress Rose. But what hope was there for him, when her heart was buried with the man she had known as Henry Langdon? Lived there a man, I wondered, who would ever have the power to revive in her so much as a spark of responsive love? Certainly not Harcourt. He was not masterly enough.

The sun was just tipping the crests of the tall pines with its golden radiance as we passed through the great gates at Silk Hope, held wide apart for us by grinning, white-toothed pickaninnies, and took the road at a brisk pace. There was a rattling of wheels, jingling of harness, and trampling of hoofs as the great chaise moved off.

I turned and looked back at the noble pile that was

Silk Hope House. Unaccountably there was a feeling of sadness in my heart. Would I ever see it again? I continued to gaze till the gables, chimneys, and roofs of the fine old plantation home faded from view.

The horses were in excellent fettle, and Ephraim, proudly erect on the driver's seat, and in the Governor's handsome livery, presented a fine figure. Harcourt and I rode beside the chaise.

I was arrayed in my finest feathers, and I had flung into the saddle all atingle with the joy of what lay before me. In the freshness of a golden morning, with young blood coursing through the veins, the finest of horse flesh under you, and the eyes of your lady love admiringly regarding you, what more could a man desire?

There had been some trouble with reference to my little Cupid. I could not bear to leave him behind, to meet with neglect and mayhap suffering; neither could I take him with me on horseback. It was Alec, adorable as usual, who came to my aid.

"He is going with me in the chaise," said she, and held out her arms for him.

At this there was an indignant outcry from Mistress Rose and an angry protest from Madam Ball.

"The dirty little beast can't come in here!" declared Mistress Rose. "Put him down, Alecia, if you have any regard for the feelings of others."

" 'Tis a monstrous outrage," snapped Madam Ball, "that we have to be inflicted with fleas in addition to heat and dust! Have you no sense as to the fitness of things, Alecia Hastings? But what could one expect of an ill-mannered chit like you? Put down the dirty little beast, unless you want me to throw him out!"

She cackled wickedly as she bent to seize the dog.

But Alec successfully thwarted her. Her eyes flashed as she told Madam:

"You shall not touch him! And he stays right here beside me. As to his being dirty, he is cleaner than you are at this moment, since he had a bath this very morning, which I am sure you did not."

I drew back, smiling; well pleased by my sweetheart's spirited tilt with Madam and her loyalty to the little dog that had won her affection. No one of us at the time had the least surmise as to the splendid way in which the little beast was to pay for his passage.

I rode on, still with that feeling of lightness, of joyousness in my heart. I rejoiced in the fresh, sweet air, in the golden sunlight, in the beauty of the open spaces, the grandeur of the forest stretches, all proclaiming the Omnipotence of Him by whom they had been created.

We were a gaily-appearing cavalcade, housings, trappings, swords and fine plumage all flashing in the sunlight. We passed and were passed by other travelers; a few in gigs, many on horseback, and others afoot; all driven to the protection of the Town by the alarum of war.

Now and again we came in sight of a plantation home, with brick and mortar gateway giving entrance to a broad avenue lined by magnificent oaks. I noted how many of the fields were deserted; in others there was but a small band of laborers at work. Planters had taken not only their families but many of their black slaves to places near the Town for safety.

Madam Ball was in ill humor. Her petulant complaints were continuous. The chaise was uncomfortable. The cushions were hard, and she had no liking for being so crowded. She was tired, too, of the jerks and jars. The road was abominable; the horses untrained beasts. She was bruised and sore from head

to foot; and now, to cap it all, her bottle of fine French brandy had been misplaced. This was finally located, but still her tongue clacked on; now in complaints, again in lashings of her two young charges, who, as her ire waxed, became the main objects of her spleen.

I had seen a suggestion of wickedness in Madam's face when she had entered the chaise that morning. She was, as I had had ample opportunity to discover, of the breed that takes a keen delight in tormenting others. There had been something sardonic in the look she had given me as I had assisted her. Her little cackling laughs rang out diabolically from time to time.

She had had no fancy for chaperoning the two young women by chaise; but had desired instead to accompany the Governor and Madam Johnson. For this reason, if for no other, she would make the journey as unpleasant as she could for her two charges; of this I hadn't a doubt. Now was she verifying my belief.

Alec, she declared, was a madcap, an ill-mannered hoyden, a young woman without any sense of shame, since she had given her love unasked to a man of whom she knew nothing; a molly-coddle, a man with milk in his veins instead of red blood, a ne'er-do-well, a wanderer, who mayhap hadn't more than two shirts to his back. What could she expect from a marriage like that?

As to Mistress Rose Aylmar, here she was moping and sighing and bewailing the death of that scoundrel, Langdon, a bold villain, an arch-libertine, if ever there was one; a pickpocket for aught she knew. Who really knew anything about him? Whence had he come? Why had he so persistently refused to give any information concerning himself?

"God save us!" Madam wound up with one of her

cackling laughs; "what weak fools women can be when it comes to love!"

Mistress Rose merely snapped at her, requesting her to mind her own business; but Alec took up the cudgels with spirit.

"Where I give my heart, I give my faith," said she. "If I truly love a man, which God be praised I do"—here she sent me a glance that came near to unseating me, into such a tumult did it put my heart—"I would give no thought as to his birth. I would care naught as to whether he was of the nobility or otherwise so he was noble with the nobility of goodness, pure and upright, with the spirit of true manliness, a man made in God's own image—bless him!"

I knew she was looking at me again, but I dared not meet her eyes just then; for I knew that if I did so, I should be wholly undone. What would result from such a state, I could but surmise.

It was a blithe morning, though the sun beat down warmly upon us; too warm for comfort. But a fresh breeze, blowing straight from the sea, made it more bearable.

Butterflies sported beside the road. From all about us came the trilling of birds, the soft mysterious sounds of the forest. Despite the sunlight, the lilt of happy birds, the flitting of many bright-winged things, a shadow had fallen now upon my heart I could not shake off. It came with the vivid remembrance of the happenings in the Indian Town; the knowledge that Edward, my brother, had been a man of lawless instincts, the associate of savages; a pirate chief. Those remembrances, that knowledge would haunt me to my dying day, I knew.

Alec kept in the merriest of moods; sending gay words of banter first to me and then to Harcourt.

We had come to where the road was heavy with sand. It was hard pulling for the toiling animals, and Madam's ire was directed against Ephraim for the slowness of our progress.

Why were the beasts proceeding at such a lazy gait, she demanded. Forsooth, she was not supposed to be traveling at a snail's pace, was she? The animals were surely cobs. Why did the Governor keep such? This was most unjust, as the horses were of the finest Andalusian breed, the especial pride of the Governor.

"Whip them up!" she shouted at Ephraim. "You hear me, you black rascal? Use the lash on them till they show they are alive!"

"Missus," responded Ephraim, his black face wrinkled in protest, "Marse Governor him don't 'low no whip to touch dese horses. Dis one I carries," flourishing it, "it jus' for show."

"Lay it on them, I tell you, you black scoundrel! Otherwise I'll get out of the coach and lay it on you."

The frightened negro believing that she would do just as she threatened and losing his head, brought the lash down upon the flank of one of the nearest animals with a stinging cut. The horse reared and plunged, so did the one next to him. The others, taking fright, did likewise with the result that the chaise lurched forward with such violence there were the rending sounds of both wood and leather.

It required more than an hour to repair the damage. All the while Madam's tongue lashed us for our slowness, our incompetency, our utter unfitness as guardians of women.

Bad luck dogged our steps after this first mishap. One thing and another delayed us. There were marshy stretches to cross, as well as sandy ones, wherein the great chaise mired and had to be pried out again and

again. Thus the shadows were deepening while we were still some miles from the Town.

An uneasy feeling took possession of me. Night, as I was well aware, would bring us perils of the road. Highwaymen had been busy of late, while footpads were holding up travelers nearer the Town.

The night had thickened about us. The chaise lanterns had been lighted. Outside these there were only the stars and a young moon to show us the way. My imagination conjured up evil forms lurking in the leafy coverts along the road. Again and again I regretted that the Governor had not sent a stronger guard with the chaise. Had he thought that the night would overtake us on the road, I was sure he would have done it.

Suddenly Harcourt's horse went lame. A fragment of hard shell had embedded itself in the sensitive frog of the foot. I lingered to assist him by holding the nervous animal.

It was while we were thus employed, and the chaise had gone on ahead that the thing happened. There came a report, a flash, a prolonged yell from Ephraim as a form leapt from the bushes and brought the rearing horses to a stand.

"What the devil!" ejaculated Harcourt, sharply.

"The chaise has been attacked by footpads!" I cried out to him. "Off with you! There's not a moment to linger."

Other noises came to us as we sped toward the coach; a woman's scream, the furious barking of Cupid, an outcry of rage and pain; then the sound of breaking glass, and shrieks of torture such as a wretch roasting in hell might have uttered.

We came up in time to see a form reeling like one drunken toward the bushes, turning and twisting like one in agony, and still uttering those maddened cries,

while another form hurried away from beside the horses.

I fired at the latter, but my hand shaking somewhat, I missed. Harcourt was more successful in his aim. The second form staggered, cried out in pain, then the bushes closed about both. We fired again; but there came no further sound.

"I think both scoundrels have gotten what they deserve," said Harcourt. "At least I am sure they will give us no further trouble. But I am wondering what happened to that first rogue to send him staggering off and shrieking like a maniac."

He had met his match in Madam Ball, I was convinced, and the enlightenment received proved how well I knew her.

We peered into the coach to find Madam Ball in high glee, her cackling laugh ringing out in wicked mirth; Mistress Rose on the verge of hysterics, while Alec, with Cupid cuddled up against her, was telling him that he was the finest and the smartest, and the bravest dog that ever lived—a hero on four legs.

The rascal cocked his eye at me as I bent toward them, and his satisfied smirk plainly proclaimed, "It is all true that she is saying, and more besides!"

"The robber reached in to seize my purse and jewel-box," said Alec, smiling up at me; "when Cupid, the blessed, brave little darling, flew at him and bit him through the hand. Lawsie-me, how he did screech!" She laughed enjoyably. "Then, ere he could proceed further in his villainous intent to rob us, Madam struck him in the face with her bottle of brandy."

"My good French brandy!" deplored Madam. "To think it had to be put to so mean a use as to bathe that scoundrel! But he got more than the bath." She fairly chortled in her glee at the remembrance. "Some

nasty cuts on the face, and if I mistake not, I've blinded him, for a time at least. 'Twill be some time, I'm thinking, ere he can open those villainous orbs of his to see sufficiently to again attempt to rob honest folks.''

We had no further mishap or adventure and thus, when the night was some hours old, we came at length to the residence of Sir Christopher Bandy, a short distance outside the Town, where the ladies were to be received for a time as guests. Madam Johnson and her daughter were already there.

CHAPTER XXII

I HEAR AND ANSWER THE ALARUM OF WAR

THE widening glow of the new day was spreading over the land as I stood on the steps of Great Lawns, Sir Christopher Bandy's home, bidding good-bye to Alec. She had gotten up to give me Godspeed; for now was I bound for the Governor's encampment, to take my place among the troops, to do my part as a man, to face whatever Fate had in store for me.

"The God of the land and the sea keep you, my dearest," said she, the brown eyes swimming in tears she strove bravely to control, "and bring you back to me."

Her hands on my shoulders were like a benediction. There was a calmness, a dignity in her face such as I had not yet seen upon it in all the days of our sweet intercourse. And more than ever did I realize my folly in ever rating as madcap and feather-brained this noblest of women who had proved that she could be calm and resourceful under trial, brave and strong under suffering. More than ever, if that were possible, did my heart go out to her with an adoring love.

I had not waited for breakfast. The necessity of haste was too urgent, for more and more alarming had been the messages that had been received at Great Lawns from the Governor. So now I stood partaking of the wine and biscuits Alec, in her dear thoughtfulness, had brought me.

"Drink," said she, as she proffered the goblet. "Drink to the beauty of the morning, to the happiness God surely has in store for us."

Her eyes were luminous with love and trust and hope as she lifted them to meet mine. Then, with a little tremulous outcry of dismay, she exclaimed, "Oh, this is no manner of a fashion for a brave Sir Knight to be hieing him away to the wars, on foot and unaccoutred! It should be no prancing steed with gay trappings, with sword flashing, spurs jingling, and ——"

"And helmit lifted," I finished, "as he stoops to take the stirrup-cup from his Lady-love's hands."

I bowed to her over the goblet I was lifting to my lips.

A light flashed into her face as she swept me a courtesy in return. Then raising her brows with an arch glance, her sweet voice, like flute of bird, piped forth in the Stirrup Cup Song of Old England:

"A cup in the morning,
Brewed just at the dawning,
All other help scorning,
I bring with a will.
'Tis flavored with fleetness,
And rich with the sweetness,
Of Heaven's completeness;
Oh, drink with a will."

Now my voice joined hers, as I pressed the goblet first to her lips, and then to my own:

"Taste with thine eyes of its beauty and light,
Sip with thine ears all its sounds of delight,
Quaff with the heart every fine sense that thrills,
Feast with the soul on the strength of the hills;
Let all powers of thy being close bend to the cup,
Oh, drink, drink thy fill."

Now was it all over. Our last good-bye had been spoken, the last clinging kiss given; and I was leaving her, for the last time it might be. I dared not look back; but I knew she was still standing there, keeping vigil beside the column of the piazza, watching me as I went on, to what fate neither of us knew.

Suddenly I became aware of pattering footsteps behind me; and turned to see Cupid, crouched low now upon the grass, as though well aware of the misdemeanor of disobedience. His eyes sought mine beseechingly, and his tail began to move with an entreating wistfulness.

"No, old man," I told him firmly; "it will not do. You must go back."

Just then Alec called to him, "Come back, Cupid. Come back to me. I cannot have both my dear ones leave me."

I wondered if it were the last time I was to hear that voice, the sweetest of all earthly sounds.

The dog obeyed her at once and trotted back with head erect, and it took all my strength of purpose to keep from following him.

The tense stillness of the early morning was over everything. In the light of the newly-risen sun millions of dewdrops sparkled on the leaves of the oaks, the long needles of the pines, and lay in little silvery pools over the closely-clipped sward. The few sounds that came to me had a mellow softness; the sighing of a breeze through the trees, the cooing of birds, the drowsy murmur of the river, the slow tap-tap of a red-headed woodpecker, seeking his succulent feast. 'Twas a scene of peacefulness, of man's prosperity and happiness through which I was passing. Crowning an eminence stood the massively built house of red brick, with its turrets, its broad piazzas, its tall chimneys, and its

many shining windows. There were wide sweeps of beautifully kept lawns, dotted with noble trees, and set in the sunny spaces with exotic plants of a rich and varied foliage. Statuary gleamed amid the shrubbery, splashing fountains caught and held the light; peafowls strutted arrogantly across the lawns, with outspread wings, admiring their own plumage.

Smoke was rising from the cluster of negro cabins, and forms were moving between them and the great house. I heard now the racking of a flock of guineas, the baying of hounds, the crowing of cocks heralding the new day; the lusty singing of negro laborers taking their way to the fields.

How soon, I thought sadly, might all this scene of peacefulness, of man's proud affluence, of care-free living be changed by the devastating sweep of the flood of red carnage then threatening to break over the land. If, I mused, men would but attune their hearts to the pursuits of peace instead of the lusts of war, what an Elysian abode the world would be.

I reached the encampment to witness stirring scenes. An air of strict military discipline prevailed. Men were coming and going, but all in orderly fashion. Others were being drilled. There were quickly-spoken commands, prompt obedience. Though many of the men were raw recruits, they, nevertheless, carried themselves well, while on the face of each was a tense alertness, an anxiety to acquit himself with credit.

I soon learned of the true state of affairs; of the peril that threatened not only the Town but the entire Province. It was enough to put that look of strained anxiety upon men's faces. Unless a divine Providence cared for and aided us, we were like to become the prey of our French and Spanish foes. And as cruel as Death we knew them to be.

Two days agone the master of a privateer, trading at Charles Town port, had brought in the information of the fleet of French ships hovering close to the mouth of the harbor, and, to all appearance, preparing to enter. The privateer had been fired upon by one of the ships, but had managed to elude the chase, after having one man killed and three wounded.

Since then the appearance of the French ships in the harbor had been awaited with anxiety; but so far there had been no sign of them. The belief was general that the French commander was delaying the attack on the Town in order to give his Spanish allies time to join him.

Despite the prevalence of the plague in the Town, detachments of troops had been sent in to guard the water front, and others were preparing to enter.

As I stood taking in the scene before me, the splendid company of Island men in command of Captain Seabrook, marched by on their way to the Town. For aught they knew every man of them might be going to his death or to a slavery worse than death, but each step was firm, each head erect, on each face a look of stern purpose.

As I had been informed, the Governor had held back from sending the men into the Town to face the peril of the deadly pest, yet at the same time, he knew it must be done if the Town were properly defended. Colonel Rhett, with a heroic disregard of his own safety, was already there in command of the defenses.

I found the Governor in his tent, and with him Major Broughton and Captains Logan, Cook, Longbois and Cantey. They were gathered about the table on which a map was spread out and they were comparing certain points on it with drawings the Governor held. Before Major Broughton lay another sheet which was also con-

sulted. As I approached I heard the Governor exclaim as his finger rested upon a certain place on the map, "There, gentlemen, is our weak spot, and we must take steps at once to strengthen it."

"But where are the men to be found to guard it, with everyone needed in the Town?" Major Broughton reminded him.

"They must be spared," replied the Governor firmly. "Should the enemy take to the small boats and discover our weakness there, we should be undone."

"But there are ten chances to one that they would not discover it," Major Broughton persisted.

"We will not risk that one chance," declared the Governor, and there spoke the matchless soldier that he was.

Sir Nathaniel turned to see me standing near and motioned me to a seat beside him.

"I am relieved that you are here," he said. "I have been anxiously awaiting your coming. There are records of this conference I wish you to make."

He placed paper, quills and ink before me, then resumed with the matter under discussion.

As I sat there through the next tense moments, listening to the words that fell from the lips of these men, each acutely aware of the gravity of the situation by which they were confronted, my heart grew cold with apprehension.

With their ranks depleted by death and the pest still taking its heavy toll, far removed from all other settlements, whence aid could have been secured from men of their own nation, how were these Carolinians, staunch and courageous fighters though they were, to meet and withstand the combined fleets of France and Spain? It seemed but child's play for those formidable ships, heavily armed, to bear down upon the Town and

either capture it quickly or utterly destroy it. What mercy could be expected of foes of such known cruelty?

Although these men around the table, facing so stark a peril, endeavored to keep up a brave front and to speak in the language of hopefulness, now and again a gloomy note would creep in. Said one of the Captains at length:

" 'Tis a horde against a mere handful, might against weakness. What hope have we that we can long hold the enemy off?"

"It seems sheer madness to have even the thought of it," acquiesced another. " 'Twill be like seeking to withstand the hurricane."

"Gentlemen," said the Governor, a deep reverence in his voice, his head erect, "God reigns; and we will trust in His justice that we be not delivered to our enemies."

"And to our cannon and our powder to drive them off," spoke Captain Cantey brusquely.

The parley ended, they took their way without the tent, the Governor with them. As they stood there in a little group for a few last words, Captain Cook's arm was suddenly lifted, and he cried out sharply, "Look!"

He was pointing across the river toward an island forming a part of the outer rim of the harbor. From it four columns of smoke were slowly rising.

"The signal!" exclaimed the Governor, "The enemy's ships have crossed the outer bar, and are about to enter the harbor."

Then he began quickly to issue commands.

At the same moment that the smokes had appeared a clamor of noises had broken forth in the Town; the firing of a signal gun, the clang of bells, the roll of drums.

Soon the troops were marching by us, column after

column, company following company, and all on their way to the Town.

Captain Hyrne with his James Island men, almost every one a seasoned warrior, Captain Cantey at the head of the matchless Goose Creek troops, with its band of friendly Indians; Captain Longbois, keeping proud step with his fifty odd loyal Frenchmen from Orange Quarter and elsewhere, every one ready not only to fight for but to die if need be for the country in which they had found refuge from persecution in their own land.

Something rose in my throat as the Goose Creek Company passed, and I recalled a day when I had seen another man at their head, superb of carriage, debonair of manner, bearing himself as a king among men despite the crimes that blackened his soul. Tears stung my eyes as I prayed to God to rest his soul in peace; for villain though he had been, traitor to an honored name, he was my brother.

As the men had passed rank after rank, the good dominie, Reverend Samuel Thomas, had stood with hands uplifted and the tears trickling down his cheeks, deploring war and its horrors, yet beseeching God's blessing upon every man going forth in defense of his home and loved ones.

Now he turned to Sir Nathaniel, the fire of prophecy in his eyes, his voice ringing out in triumph:

"This day will the God of Battles give us the victory! Our enemies will flee before us as chaff driven by the wind."

"God grant that to be a true prophecy, Dominie," replied the Governor fervently.

I accompanied Sir Nathaniel, who entered the Town by way of the water, and there we came upon a scene that sent a thrill through me. From the seven bastions lining the wall the grim muzzles of more than half a

hundred great guns pointed seaward; and beside each gun a group of men, standing like statues, but ready at a moment's notice to spring into action.

Girding the Town were the massed troops, prepared to defend it at every point. But when I stood upon the battlements and saw that formidable fleet of heavily-armed ships bearing straight down upon the Town, my heart sank like lead. How long could even the well-prepared defenses of the Town hold out against such might of war as that fleet represented?

I gripped my lips and waited. There was naught else to be done at the moment; for thanks to the military ability of the Governor and his aids, all was in readiness. What was to be our fate, I speculated, death or capture? For that it would be one or the other there was little doubt. We would soon be in the sweep of the hurricane of carnage.

The men along the wall were impatient for the signal to fire. Why was it delayed? For what was Colonel Rhett waiting? Why were the French ships allowed to come on unchecked? What were the cannon for if not to teach those French pigs an early lesson? To give them a taste of what awaited them at the hands of the undaunted Carolinians?

"God-'a'-mercy!" cried out one sharply; "are those French jackals to be allowed to come up to the Town itself without a taste of our powder?"

"What ails the Colonel?" queried another. "Has the sight of all that out yonder gone to his head and knocked him silly, think you?"

" 'Tis more likely it's his knees that have weakened," came the reply. "He'll risk a parley with those French dogs yet. You'll see."

"The Lord save us! Will he subject us to such shame as that?"

The strain of waiting was telling on the men at the guns. Ominous murmurs ran from lip to lip. And still the signal was delayed and still those mighty engines of Death came on; prows high-raised, sails full set, banners fluttering; and upon deck and at porthole the gaping mouths of cannon.

I heard a sharply-indrawn breath near me.

"My God!" cried out an old man, whose quivering face I now looked on; " 'twill take but a few minutes for those mighty ships to destroy the Town and all in it! Why aren't they checked?"

"Is Rhett asleep, think you?" cried another. "Why doesn't he give the order to fire?"

"Good Lord!" came other excited words; "are they to be allowed to take the Town without a shot fired?"

And in the midst of all that tension stood Colonel William Rhett, commander of the forces, Admiral of the Carolina fleet; he of the eagle eye and the wariness of a fox—the one man calm, wholly unmoved by the clamor, with the same cool answer to every importuning:

"When the range is near enough for every shot to find its mark, we will fire; not before. We have no powder to waste."

Then it was that just as Colonel Rhett was on the point of giving the signal to fire the queer thing happened; queer it was to many of us, but there were others who construed it as having a more significant meaning. The Hand of Providence they termed it. The French fleet had suddenly halted. Out there in mid-harbor, dropping anchor, the ships had come to a standstill. It all happened in a moment, just as if some restraining Hand had been laid upon them. What could it mean? There were those who were asking if it could be a ruse on the part of the French Admiral, a trick whereby to gain some advantage?

"Jeminy!" cried out one who stood near me; "now we'll get it! They are preparing to pour a broadside into us."

But seconds passed and the guns remained as silent as the ships were motionless, save for a gentle rocking of the tide. Again the question sped from lip to lip, What could it mean?

"Now's the Colonel's time!" I heard another exclaim. "Why doesn't he let 'em have it?"

But bastions as well as ships remained silent. Excitement was running high. Exclamations of amazement were heard on all sides. Comments flew thick and fast.

"What's happened to that frog-eater, the French Admiral, do you suppose?"

"He's got a scare, let me tell you."

"Well, it looks like it."

"The knaves have just gotten a good look at all these cannon, and it's been too much for them."

"That's it, for a fact. Ha! Ha! I, for one, wouldn't be surprised to see 'em turn tail and scurry away like so many frightened hares!"

"Why, by Jingo! Just look yonder! If they aren't turning to go back!"

This was what was really happening. The French ships had lifted anchor and were turning in retreat!

A mighty cheer went up from the men along the bastions. Then taunts, hoots, mocking shouts, cries of defiance were sent out over the water after the retreating ships.

"Most amazing!" exclaimed the Governor. "But it is probably some maneuver, preparatory to another advance upon the Town from a different point."

"Oh, they'll try it again," agreed Captain Cantey. "They'll be back to-morrow if not to-night."

"I think not," said a quiet voice, and turning we saw

Colonel Rhett standing there, his face still stern but with the ghost of a smile playing over his lips. "There will be no further attempt to attack the Town."

"This day has a righteous cause triumphed over the evil that threatened it!"

'Twas the Dominie's voice ringing out with fervor.

"Praise be to Him, the Lord God of Hosts, who has turned back the enemy before us! No more now need fear to dwell in our hearts. Our God has succored us. Praise ye His holy name!"

But although anxiety had been allayed, it did not slumber. No man there could tell what might happen next; for though the enemy had retreated, there were the ships still in plain sight, anchored off Sullivan's Island. At any moment their great guns might be turned upon the Town. So, strict watch was kept through the night by the vigilant Carolinians.

But the next morning, instead of another advance upon the Town, there came, under a flag of truce, a communication to the Governor from the French Admiral, Monsieur de Feboure, demanding, in the name of the French King, not only the unconditional surrender of the Town but of the entire Province. All inhabitants were to be treated as prisoners of war. One hour only was given for the Governor's reply.

In the communication Monsieur de Feboure took occasion to remind Governor Johnson that all the territory known as Carolina was already rightfully the possession of His Majesty, Louis XIV, of France. Antedating by more than a century that of any English settlement of America, Captain Jean Ribault, a heroic Admiral of France, had landed a colony on the shores of Carolina, had taken possession of the country in the name of the French King, Carolus IX, for whom it had been named and had there set up a pillar to commemo-

rate the event. Further, there had been a second settlement of the French colonists on an adjacent island, where a fort had been built, also called in honor of His Majesty.

Therefore, in consideration of these facts, the surrender of the entire territory was now demanded, in the name of His Majesty, Louis of France; and but one hour would be given to the consideration of the demand.

The Governor, his fine old head upflung, his eyes flashing, disdaining the writing of even a line in reply, said to the messenger:

"Tell your Admiral that not so much as a minute do I want for an answer to his note. I make it now, and for all time. Say to him that I hold this Town and the Province of Carolina in the name of Her Majesty, the Queen of England; and not one foot of it will I yield to the French King nor to any other claimant. Say further to Monsieur de Feboure that as I feel so feels every man enlisted under me for the defense of his country, and defend it we will to the last drop of our blood."

When the Governor's answer was made known, there came a tremendous cheering from the men all along the lines, and now of a truth was the fine spirit of the "Grand Old Knight" for the first time really understood by his countrymen.

Furthermore of the intrepid spirit of the Carolinians Monsieur de Feboure's messenger learned ere his departure.

"My compliments to your Admiral," said Colonel Rhett suavely; "and say to him from me," now his voice rang out like a challenge, "that any attempt to take this Town will be like seeking to go through an iron gate."

We waited hour after hour. Sunrise and sunset, and

still no "smoke of battle" came from the French ships. But shortly accounts were being brought in of marauding parties from the ships having landed on two of the islands, plundering, burning, and driving off the inhabitants. One or more hapless persons, having resisted the invaders, had been killed. Detachments of troops were now sent out to drive off the marauders. A number of the enemy were killed and captured; the remainder being driven back to the boats. And still those vessels lingered over against the island like evil things.

" 'Tis time those French dogs were driven off from there," said Colonel Rhett to the Governor, his face grim and set. And forthwith the Carolina flotilla of five small vessels was made ready. 'Twas like another stripling David going forth to meet a giant Goliath. But in command of the fleet was Colonel William Rhett, Carolina's first Admiral, he who was to bring such renown to the Colony by his bold exploits at sea. And not the less of his achievements was the chasing of the French ships that day. It was a chase, and naught else; for no sooner did the French Admiral get sight of that bold armada setting forth from the Town than he turned tail and sped off to sea! There was great cheering at this, both aboard the pursuing ships and along the sea wall.

Rhett chased the French ships till they were no longer in view. Then, hearing of an enemy vessel that still lingered in one of the bays, he set off after it. The French ship was captured ere its commander had so much as the time to fire a single shot. Thus ended the French and Spanish attempt to go through that "iron door" at Charles Town. And so far as ever I heard, in all the years that followed, never once did enemy of any nation ever succeed in gaining entrance through it.

'Twas some time after the scurrying away like

frightened hares of the Frenchmen, at sight of Admiral Rhett's bold little fleet, that we heard of the death of Monsieur de Feboure. The French commander, in chagrin at his ignominious defeat, had committed suicide.

There was great rejoicing not only in the Town, but throughout the Province at the complete routing of the enemy. The troops were publicly praised and thanked for their "brave conduct." Delegations waited upon both the Governor and Admiral Rhett, expressing the admiration and gratitude of the people in recognition of the conspicuous military ability they had displayed in thwarting the designs of the enemy. Especially was the Governor commended and thanked for his zeal and forethought in having placed the Town in so strong a condition of defense. And now I learned for the first time that the Governor had borne almost the entire expense of fortifying the Town out of his own purse.

Pity it was that this could not have been remembered, as well as other proofs of his generosity and loyalty to the Colony, when later, misjudged and calumniated, he was haled before the Parliament, to answer for acts he had no thought of committing, and to suffer the ignominy of being removed from office.

Truly is there that in ingratitude that biteth like the serpent.

CHAPTER XXIII

I WITNESS THE END OF A SCOUNDREL

THE summer was over, and it was now mid-October. With the coming of cooler weather the pest in the Town had abated. There were just a few isolated cases, and the Town was being rapidly cleansed. The Governor had lingered to give his attention to matters, for there were many things for which he was needed; but the ladies were still at Great Lawns.

I spent most of the time with him; but there were occasions when I could be spared for visits to Great Lawns. Thus, in addition to other sweet hours of companionship with Alec, there were walks in the glowing autumn woods.

Yet despite these precious hours with her, my heart was heavy, for in all this time I had had no word from my father. Disappointed in me, fretted by my folly of having been so careless in the trust reposed in me, confirmed in his opinion of my utter unworthiness, had he cast me off entirely?

If it were really true that he had disowned me, and of a truth had I much cause for so believing, then was I indeed what others had come to regard me, a man without a home, a penniless adventurer. And being such, how dared I ask so radiant, so glorious a being as Alec, my beloved, to share my gloomy lot? 'Twere madness even to think of it.

She, who was so gracious by nature, so high-born, should rule over a royal domain and none other. Then, as though to add to the depth of my gloom, I recalled the cutting of the cake, and the fine fortune foretold

for her. Yea, it was castle and title she should have, and naught else.

So 'twas but miserable thoughts that I had on this afternoon as, with Alec's hand in mine, we wandered through the woods aflame with the red and golden hues of autumn's brush.

'Twas a smiling, peaceful land after the shock of battle. We had glimpses of the river, above which sea-birds were flying, dipping slow, graceful wing against the blue of the sky. Again it was a vista of fields with yellowed stalks of ripened grain.

The ground was strewn with the brown needles of the pines, red and gold and russet leaves fluttered down about us. Squirrels frisked from limb to limb. Birds, too, were busy. Two blue jays were calling to each other. "Edle-up! edle-up!" came the love notes.

Alec was in the brightest of moods, as vividly glowing as were the autumn hues, alternately wheedling and bantering me. As I had no heart with which to respond as usual, 'twas very shortly she discovered my abstraction.

"Mark," she glanced up to demand, "what ails you? Why that cloud on your face? Art haunted by remembrance of the horror that is war? Forget it, dearest; in the thought of the joys of the future."

Then it was that unable to keep them longer to myself, I poured out to her all my miserable thoughts.

"Alec, heart-of-my-heart," I concluded, "this cannot go on. I had no right to pledge troth with you. 'Tis madness to think it can continue. As much as I love you, and God knows how great is that love, how it possesses every fiber of me, I must say farewell, and here and now, for wholly unworthy am I to ——"

She caught and shook my arm, thus halting my speech.

"Mark!" she cried out, "are you mad? What has gotten into you? What possesses you to talk thus to me?"

"The knowledge of the gulf between us, of how far above me you are."

"I could slap you," said she, her eyes on fire, "were it not for the shame that would thus be put upon you. Oh, Mark, you ninny, you softy! Ever were you the blindest of bats!"

Now there rippled forth a sweet and joyous laugh like the bubbling of a spring.

"Yes, blind I have been," I told her humbly, "but blind must I no longer be. Oh, can you not see?" I entreated. " 'Tis unthinkable, altogether impossible that one so exquisite as you should mate with such as I am. 'Tis the fine things of earth to which you are entitled. A great lady you should be."

"Mark," said she slowly, solemnly, a glory in her face, "there is nothing great but God; and naught that counts like Love, since God is Love." Then with one of her quick changes and a flashing smile, she quoted to me:

> "Marry never for home, and never for lands,
> Nor marry for aught but Love."

"But Love of itself," I reminded her, "cannot provide food and raiment and shelter," and back I quoted to her:

> "Love in a hut with water and a crust,
> Is naught else but cinders, ashes, dust."

At this she cried out at me and stamped her foot.

"Oh, for shame, for shame! to utter such traitorous

words. Look at me, Mark Ashton! Look at me, I say! 'Tis not your true self that has spoken and you know it!"

"I would be no true man," I told her, my eyes meeting hers, unfaltering now, "did I hold you to your promise to me. Oh, Alec, dear love, will you not also see it thus? Now must I be man enough to leave you."

These words I managed to say calmly, though my heart was breaking.

She caught and held me.

"You will do no such thing; not in this manner. In the ordinary way of parting, of course, but not thus. Mark, listen to me! You shall not continue in this mood. We have Love and Love is all in all, the one priceless thing. All else can be bought but not Love. There is no market on earth where Love that is really Love is sold. 'Tis above money, for money cannot buy it. 'Tis the one great thing of earth and we have it, Mark, and having it, have all wealth."

"Love can do much, but money can do more," I told her sordidly, for in all honor was I bound to hold out against her.

"Then have we both," said she, and now a sweet confusion seized her. She looked away, and her cheeks crimsoned. "Have I not enough and more than enough for us both?"

It was as though she had really struck me. My head went up, and there was more of a hurt pride in my voice than I intended as I told her.

"No man of spirit, with the least remnant of pride, can give his consent to live on his wife's money."

She turned swiftly, and her arms were flung around me.

"Now, Mark, Mark! Have I hurt you? And oh, my dear, I did not intend it. 'Tis never, never will I men-

tion such again. But oh, my dear love, you shall not do this cruel thing you purpose. You shall not break troth with me. We have pledged ourselves, each to the other, and naught shall part us."

"My unworthiness must part us," I told her as firmly as I could for the emotion that was shaking me from head to foot at that moment. "Oh, my love, my love! I cannot drag you down to such as would be your life with me a penniless outcast, not fit ——"

"Hush!" she commanded as her fingers were pressed against my lips. "Never dare utter such words again! You are mine, as I am yours, through life, through death, through eternity."

Her lips were quivering as she lifted her face to mine, yet the light in her eyes held steady, and that one look she gave me was worth all the wealth of the world. But as I held her crushed in my arms, my heart beating madly against hers, still was I firm in my resolve that unless life took on a brighter outlook for me, never would I claim her as wife.

All danger from the plague was now past. The Governor had opened the Town house, and the ladies were established there, with the exception of Madam Broughton, who had gone to her home on the river. Silk Hope had been left in the care of Jonathan Mullins.

Sir Nathaniel was still busy with a multitude of affairs. Principally was he concerned with the matter of restoring the commercial prosperity of the Colony. All lines of trade had been sadly disorganized by the troubles with the French and Spaniards. So long as those enemy ships hovered near to the entrance of the port, all friendly vessels were frightened away. There had been no craft in from the Mother Country for some weeks now.

But vessels had been for some time arriving from the

Northern Colonies, from the West Indies and from ports too far away for rumors of the outbreak of the war to have reached them. The pirates, too, had had much to do with the disorganized condition of commerce, growing bolder and bolder in preying upon vessels, no matter of what nation. The raging of the plague in the Town had also kept many ships from entering the port.

Despite that not so many vessels had as yet come in or departed, there were bustling scenes presented all along the wharves as I approached them on this morning. Cargoes were being made ready for departing ships and in anticipation of the coming of others. There were also cargoes piled along the wharves that had been discharged by arriving vessels.

As I approached one of the wharves my attention was attracted to a group of men, conversing in some excitement. I soon learned it was with reference to the latest exploit of those bold scoundrels, the pirates. They had captured that morning and carried off, with every man of the crew in chains, a merchant vessel anchored just outside the entrance to the harbor, waiting for daylight to enter. And on this vessel had been two residents of the Town!

"Of course, those black fiends have murdered every man of them by this time!" one exclaimed as I joined the group.

" 'Tis an outrage, a crying shame!" declared another, "that a stop hasn't been put to the black work of these devils! They are as bold as the Old Harry himself. When are they to be called to account for their dastardly deeds?"

"Be patient," he was told. "The Admiral is preparing to go out after them. He'll get them and we'll see the last one of them strung up and left for the buzzards to pick."

"The Admiral's going out after them this very day," added another.

I knew this to be true, for no later than this morning Admiral Rhett had been for a conference with the Governor. He was to sail with the tide that afternoon. So I rejoiced with them in the hope that these black-hearted devils of the sea would soon be run down and exterminated.

I had some business to transact for the Governor at another wharf. It was while I was busy bending over to check off a shipment that had just arrived from Silk Hope that I heard sudden excited exclamations, then a shout as of joy, and quickly another. Footsteps passed me going hastily, and as I looked up to learn the cause of the commotion, I saw men hurrying to that portion of the wharf that fronted the sea. A group of them had already gathered there.

"'Tis a packet at last from Old England," said a man who passed me; "the first in many a day; and if I mistake not, she is bringing both mail and passengers."

At those words my heart gave a bound. If there was really mail on board, then perhaps there were letters for me.

I hurried forward, and soon found a place where I had full view of the incoming vessel. By now she was near mid-harbor, no more than three miles away, and coming on jauntily, every sail set and the English colors flying from every masthead.

A cheer broke forth from the men along the wharf.

"Old England forever!" roared a voice.

"Hurrah, mate!" cried out another. "The Mother Land now and always first in our hearts."

"By St. George!" exclaimed a man beside me, "she's a staunch craft. Look at those guns. To all appearance she's outwitted those damn pirates. Why!" he

burst forth exultantly, " 'tis none other than *The Hornet,* Her Majesty's own ship. Hip! hurrah!" and up went his hat, waved frantically.

As the vessel neared the wharf, the cheering broke forth anew, swelled into a roar of sound; and so great was the press about me now, men struggling to pass each other, I lost sight of all save the masts of the vessel and the gaily fluttering colors, but I heard clearly the creaking of timbers and the rattling of chains as she was made fast to the wharf.

I fought my way through the surging mass of men, and at length found access to a pile of lumber, and from there I had satisfactory view of what was taking place. The passengers were beginning to disembark. In groups of two and three they came over the gangway.

Suddenly my heart gave a leap, then seemed to cease beating and a thrill shot through me. Could I be mistaken? Were my eyes befooling me? Was that the conjuring up of a befuddled brain on which I looked?

But no, no! God be praised, 'twas no conjured up vision on which I gazed; no nightmare of the brain. I knew too well that proudly held form, that handsome erect head, those nobly cut features. 'Twas my father and none other. He was using a cane but there was only a slight limp in his gait. Beside him was his valet, Robert Meldrow, and just behind him —— Again my heart gave a leap of joy, for 'twas none other than Adam, good old Adam Ware!

In my haste to reach my father, I went over everything in my way. Men looked up as I fought for my passage through the press, to gape at me and to exclaim as though they thought me demented. And demented of a truth I was, demented with joy.

At last I had reached him.

"Father!" I cried. "Father!" then suddenly halted as a pang of doubt pierced me. How would he receive me?

Swiftly his eyes kindled. His arms went out to me. "My son!" he exclaimed. His arms were around me now, and for the first time within my memory my father had kissed me.

Adam's trembling hand fell upon my shoulder and I turned to give him such embrace as I am sure he had never had before in all the many years of his life.

"When no letters came, lad," he said, his voice all aquaver, "we knew not what to think. It might be that you were dead. So, we had to come to end the suspense. And praise be to God we find you alive."

So this was why I had never received answer to my communications. They had never reached my father. And now felt I a great wave of happiness in my heart that, after all my hard thoughts of him, he had really cared enough for me to come and learn my fate.

Then was I again pierced by doubts. Gloomy reflections took possession of me. Was it not more because of his desire to learn of what had befallen my brother Edward that he had come? But I would not make myself unhappy by such thoughts, I shortly resolved. I could not forget that swift kindling of the eyes, the cadence in his voice as he had called me "Son," the pressure of his arms and that kiss upon my cheek. I had all that to remember if I never had anything more. And now, too, was my heart lightened by what his coming meant to me. No longer would I be held with reproach among men as pretender and adventurer. My right to the name I bore would be proved, my station in life made clear. As my father's acknowledged son, altogether different would my position become; and as I thought of Alec and what this

would mean in my relation to her, my heart sang its pæan of rejoicing.

I wanted to take my father straight to Sir Nathaniel's home, for I was sure of the welcome he would receive there; but he would not consent. He would go to the Inn first, he said. Then, when he and the Governor had met and renewed old acquaintance, it would be time to consider an invitation.

Now was I faced by a hard task, that of telling my father of my brother's death. How many times I wished he could have gotten my written account of it. To inform him by word of mouth, face to face with him, was much more difficult. Constantly had I the fear that I would make a slip somewhere, and thus give him an inkling of the truth. But I got through with it much better than I had dared to hope. Really what I had to tell seemed to be of no great surprise to him, nor did he receive it with the show of grief I expected. 'Tis true his eyes filled, his face was white and drawn and his voice shook as he questioned me. But in some way he gave me the feeling that he had been not altogether unprepared for the news of my brother's death and very shortly his words confirmed it.

"'Tis no more than I expected," said he sadly, "knowing as I did Edward's wild, restless spirit, his rash temperament, his craze for adventure. God keep his soul in peace."

The Governor came the next morning. He had gone to Sewee Bay the day before. There was real happiness in the meeting of the two old comrades-at-arms. They talked long, at times sorrowfully; again with animation as the experiences of the past were recalled.

Sir Nathaniel insisted that my father should leave the Inn at once. So, shortly were we domiciled at Exeter House, as the Governor's Town residence was

called, and that very evening there was great rejoicing throughout the Town. Admiral Rhett had returned, bringing with him the pirate ship and such of the crew as had not been killed in the fray. Among those brought in was the pirate chief himself. The news set me to wondering as to who this pirate captain could be, since to my knowledge he whom I had known as Black Locks was no more; and a great wave of thankfulness flooded my heart that such was the case.

'Twas two mornings later. A ship had come in the day before, laden with European goods of the finest stuffs; and the goods were now on display at one of the shops. As it was announced that everything of the latest and most attractive in Dame Fashion's marts, "was here to be had," naturally Mistress Rose and Alec were possessed with the liveliest desire to have a look at the tempting array. That it would be much more than a look, I was convinced.

Thus was I importuned by Alec to accompany them, since, owing to the excitement that still ran high in the Town on account of the capture of the pirate chief and his crew, the Governor had requested that the ladies of the household go not out upon the streets unattended.

We had but little more than left the house, when we heard an imperative call behind us, and turned to see Affra hurrying toward us, with Cupid pattering behind.

"This won't do, minx," Alec told her. "You must go back, you know. 'Tis no place for you where we are going."

"But it is," Affra asserted as she reached us almost breathless. " 'Twas only this morning that Madam Johnson said I was to have a new watchet blue silken dress, and one, too, of India muslin all besprigged with flowers and made with many flounces, and a bodice with much lace, and silken hose to match, and—and high-

heeled slippers with rosettes and silver buckles. And I am to have, too, a white plumed hat and a jewel-box all my own and a little string of pearls and a ruby pin and—and ——"

But here both her breath and her words gave out.

"The Saints preserve us!" cried Alec, holding up her hands in mock dismay. "What put all this nonsense into your head, chit?"

" 'Tis no nonsense, as you know. Remember you not that I will soon be turning twelve? Then do you not see 'tis high time I was thinking of what would be most becoming to me?"

Here she lifted her chin to look squarely at Alec.

" 'Twas just this morning, as you well know, Alec, that you said that a woman had as well be an oyster in the bank as to be out of the fashion. So there!"

At this we each laughed merrily; for 'twas too amusing to see the little witch aping the airs of woman.

"And you know you said, too," went on Affra, ignoring our humor, "while you were preening before the mirror, that 'twas a shame when one had pretty looks not to adorn them."

Alec blushed confusedly as I glanced mischievously at her.

"I said that, minx? 'Twas dreaming you must have been."

" 'Twas no dreaming, as you well know and you said, too, as you made courtesy to yourself, that ——"

But at this moment Alec's fingers, placed hastily over Affra's lips, stopped all further disclosure and, very conciliatory now, Alec said:

"Well, come along then, since you are so determined. But remember 'tis no rash purchases you are to make."

We had proceeded but a short distance on our way when I became aware that there was a considerable de-

gree of excitement manifest in the manner of the people abroad this morning. The street was fast filling. Groups were entering it from the alleyways and side streets; and on each face, as the throngs began to pass us or to crowd up about us, I noticed a look of tense expectancy. The same look was on the faces of the merchants and others gathered about the doors of the shops. Windows were rattling above us as they were being pushed up or flung back, and heads were poked out.

Now I heard shouts in the distance, then a commingling of sounds. Plainly was it an uproar, an outbreak of some turbulent nature. It filled me with unease and I strove to get those I was escorting off the street and as quickly as I could. But by now the press about us had become so great 'twas difficult to proceed. People were elbowing and jostling each other, all evidently endeavoring to press toward the same point of advantage, the curb along the edge of the walk that bordered the street. And I saw to my surprise that detachments of the Town guards were endeavoring to keep this strip of roadway clear, and succeeding very poorly, because of the determination of the crowds pressing down upon them. Something of a most unusual nature was about to happen. That was quite plain.

I heard exclamations of dismay from my companions, excited queries as to what could be the matter; but in my efforts to keep them all near me and to prevent them from being injured by the surging mass of people, I took no time for answering. Of a truth, I did not care to enlighten them just then, for by now the excited comments I had heard around me had given me clear understanding. The pirate chief was to be executed that morning; was even now on his way to the gallows. Strange I had not heard it was to be and then not so

very strange either when I remembered that the Governor was away and that all of the day before I had not left the house because I was too busily writing.

Affra was pressing hard against me with every step I managed to take and I saw that she had picked up Cupid to keep him from being trampled on. My eyes grew tender as I noted her love for and care of the little dog.

"Oh, if we could only get out of this!" exclaimed Alec despairingly, as she was pushed here and there despite my firm hold of her.

"We must do it!" asserted Mistress Rose, her eyes flashing. "This mob of people must give way and let us pass for I have no fancy to be held here in such company."

Though they were striving to be brave, they were both very white, for by now they, too, had become aware of the cause of the excitement. But no step either backward or forward could we take, because were we caught hard and fast in the press.

The shouts, the hoots, the yells were coming nearer and nearer. They were caught up by the crowd around us and sent forth with vehemence.

At this moment two of the Town guards, with drawn swords, having in some miraculous manner forced back the surging mass of people to the right and to the left of us, we were left standing along the edge of the walk. Through the rift thus made I saw the cart coming toward us, and sitting in it, conducting himself in the most nonchalant fashion, bowing, smiling, and passing jest for jest, the condemned man going to his doom.

On each side of the cart walked three of the Town guards with drawn swords. Seated beside the criminal was that good and noble man, the Reverend Samuel Thomas. With his head bent over his leathern Bible, he

was reading passages of Scripture but no more attention was that villainous pirate paying to him than if he had not been there. There was naught of the penitent evildoer in his appearance; rather was he conducting himself as though he were some grand personage to whom honor was being paid.

To the shouts and jeers of those about us were added taunting exclamations, words of anger and denunciation as the cart came into view.

"String up the pirate! Let the bloody villain die and quickly! He sent others to their death, now let him taste death himself!"

"Yea, let him swing. He deserves not one grain of mercy, he who showed none to others."

"A righteous end for such a villain, thief and murderer that he is. The wonder is that it did not overtake him long ago."

"Ha! the Terror of the Seas going to his just deserts at last!"

"Run to earth; caught in the net of Carolina's great Admiral. Rhett forever! Hurry the villain along to his doom ere he escape as he did before."

"Hang him up to poison the buzzards, the foul wretch!"

These and other similar denunciations were shouted out as the cart approached, and were followed by jibes, taunts, howls of joy that the villain was about to get his deserts. For had he not robbed their ships, paralyzed their commerce and murdered among others men of the Town?

But not all the cries were those of anger and revilement. I heard a woman sobbing. One cried out in reproach, "Shame! Shame! to howl so madly for his blood!" From the lips of another came brokenly a prayer, "Oh, God have mercy upon his poor soul!"

The crowd was now surging about us like a sea upheaved by a tempest. To right and left they swayed, pushing, jostling, plucking at each other, each struggling to get nearer the curb, gone mad for the moment to get view of the face of the bold Terror of the Seas. They would have pushed us down into the street but for the efforts of the officers of the guards who, making free use of their weapons, forced them back.

The cart had come to a sudden halt, for despite all the guards could do, a portion of the crowd had swept down into the roadway. The cart could proceed no further till the way was clear.

It had halted almost opposite to where we stood and of a sudden the pirate chief, who had been passing jest with someone on the other side of the street, turned his head. His chin was up, his head bare, the curled ringlets of glossy black sweeping his shoulders. His eyes flashed mockingly along the sea of faces. Now they rested full upon us.

I felt the earth swaying beneath me.

Merciful God! it was he! Edward, my brother! But how coarsened of feature, how wholly evil of look he had become! Oh, if only he had died there in that Indian village, as we believed had been the case. And now here was this awful thing happening, and my father just arrived in the Town!

I heard a sharp outcry from Mistress Rose, and turned quickly. Her face was blanched, and she was swaying as though about to fall. I caught and supported her. She was saying gaspingly, "No, no, no! it cannot be! God in Heaven! 'tis impossible! And yet—and yet——"

Alec had clutched my arm. Her fingers were pressing into it with a grip that made me wince.

"What mystery is this?" she queried, her eyes re-

garding me perplexedly. "Yonder is—and yet how can it be? Then was it after all but play-acting on his part, and has he lived to—to come to this? Oh, Mark! my dear, dear love, how terrible this is for you!"

She broke down now, and was sobbing against me.

Affra, her eyes big and round, and staring hard at the evil face of the man regarding us mockingly, was crying out, as she clasped Cupid close to her, "Oh! oh! 'tis the terrible Black Ogre who lived at the Castle!"

I gazed at her in astonishment. What was possessing the child to say this?

The man in the cart, having his attention now directed more closely to the excited child, with the dog clasped in her arms, broke into sardonic laughter. Then he called authoritatively:

"To me, Belial! To me! Do you hear me, sir? To me! Come and take your turn along with me, you faithless little devil!"

'Twas the same devilishly cruel voice that had so frightened the little dog in the stubble field at Silk Hope, and at the sound of it again he yelped out, then crouched closer against Affra, trembling and whimpering.

"No, you don't get him!" Affra called out defiantly. "He isn't yours. He's ours!"

"Ours? Ha! ha! that's a good one!" His gaze took us all in, one by one. He bowed mockingly, and swept his hand in a half circle as though it held plumed hat. "Ha! ha!" he laughed again. "Old acquaintances, by Jove!"

It was at this moment I felt a hand clasp my shoulder and heard a voice close to my ear remark laconically, "A devilishly fine actor, think you not so, brother?"

Startled, I turned swiftly, and saw him standing

there; somewhat of that same mocking light that was in the evil face of the man in the cart, shining in his eyes; and while one hand still grasped my shoulder, the other arm was around Mistress Rose. With her head against him, she was looking up at him with such light as was never of earth or sky aglow in her face.

"Yes, 'tis really I, dear heart, and none other," he was saying as he bent down to press kiss upon her lips.

"Edward!" I gasped out. "Edward, my brother!"

"Yes, your brother," said he, lifting his head to glance at me. "Your brother come back from the gates of death, thanks to the devotion and skill of my noble Indians."

As he spoke, I saw that two of them were with him.

Still gazing at him, dazed, bewildered, unable even yet to credit my own eyes, I stammered out, "But I—I thought that you—that you ——"

"Yes, I know what you thought," he interrupted. "Zounds! what a fiend you must have considered me, brother." Then, as his voice broke, he added, "Boy, how blind you have been! Dull of wit, too; amazingly so for my father's son."

"But," I cried out, still in a daze, "who, in Heaven's name, is that out yonder?" Yet before he could reply, it came to me like a revealing flash of light. Now at last had I clear understanding. Amazingly blind had I indeed been that I had not seen it before.

Here, in truth, was Edward, my brother, beside me; and yon was that arch-villain, Andrew Boland, of whom Adam Ware had first told me. He was the black-hearted scoundrel who had robbed me and others aboard the *Abigail and Anne;* who had frightened my little Cupid half out of his wits in the field at Silk Hope; the midnight prowler who had spied upon those in the ball-room; the villain intent upon killing me at Oaklands.

The way had been cleared; the cart was moving on. I saw my brother with tense face gazing after it. Then he said:

" 'Tis but his just deserts that he is getting; for he was a fiend incarnate; as black-hearted a devil as ever walked the earth. He was the one evil influence in my life and weak was I not to resist it. But now, thank God, I shall be free!"

The crowd was surging after the cart. I was caught and borne along. I sought to extricate myself, but in vain.

Thus shortly I came in sight of that hideous thing, the gallows, uprearing its ghastly form. The hangman stood waiting.

With the same air of bravado he had maintained all along the scoundrel ascended the scaffold.

Beside him, and still striving to win from him some expression of sorrow for the past, some word of penitence before his soul was ushered into Eternity, was the good dominie. But the base wretch with whom he plead gave no sign of repentance. Instead he continued to flout the holy man.

Suddenly in brazen voice he cried out:

"Parson, if you have a message to send to hell, give it me. I'll take it straight!"

I could stand no more of the horror. I must leave the awful place. I finally succeeded in making my way through the press.

When I reached Exeter House I found them all gathered in the drawing-room. My heart was beating rapidly as I thought of the joy that would be depicted on my father's countenance on finding that the son he had mourned as dead was alive. But to my surprise there was a grave, even sad, expression on his face.

There was, however, a swift kindling of the eyes as he turned, saw me, and motioned to a chair beside him.

"Come and sit here, my son," he said; and only once before had I heard such tenderness in his tone.

My brother smiled at me whimsically.

"So! you are here at last? We have been waiting for you. I thought mayhap the crowd had hanged you along with the pirate." Then he turned to our father, to whom he had been speaking when I entered.

"So you see, sir, I should be most unhappy did I do as you desire and to see my unhappiness would make you, too, unhappy. I have no heart to return to England, for my heart is here in this new land, where things are to be done to stir men's blood. Believe me, father," —now his voice dropped to a softer tone, "with the love, the lure of this wild, free land in my blood, with that which would be constantly tugging at my heart, calling me back, I should be wholly unfit for those duties and responsibilities to which you would have me return. Most of all, I could never be to you the son you deserve and should have.

"There," pointing to me, "is your heir, the true scion of your House, the son who will be truly the staff of your old age. There sits the one worthy the title and the estates."

Clearly, distinctly my father's voice came through the silence that for the instant ensued:

"Such is my own opinion. God forgive me that I have been so long blinded to the truth;" and now his hand reached out and caught and held mine. And what I saw in his eyes set me to tingling with happiness in every fiber.

My brother drew himself again erect. There was that in his bearing that was fine, splendid. He looked every inch a man.

"Thus has it come about as it should be," said he. "And so I return to my wilderness kingdom, to my own loyal, faithful subjects; there to reign to the end of my days."

He turned swiftly, his arms extended.

"Rose, heart of my heart, life of my life, will you come with me, my beloved and honored wife?"

"To the end of the world—and beyond," said she as she went into his arms, the love-light like star-shine in her eyes.

Two weeks later there was a second wedding; this time in the English Church. There were flowers and bridesmaids and a great to-do for this wedding, as befitted the princess whose nuptial day it was. Among the most important of the guests was a glowing-eyed little lass, in fashion's finest array, sitting in the very front pew, and struggling with a wriggling dog, who seemed possessed with the opinion that he and not the Governor was the proper one to bestow the bride upon the groom.

"So, your highness," said my wife, the moment we were alone, her chin uptilted and her eyes twinkling saucily, "it seems I have had, after all, to take the prince and the castle."

" 'Tis most happily for me that it so turns out, dear heart," I replied as I caught and kissed her, "since I never would have permitted you to marry the pauper."

"I marry whom I please, sir," said she, flashing her eyes at me.

THE END

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